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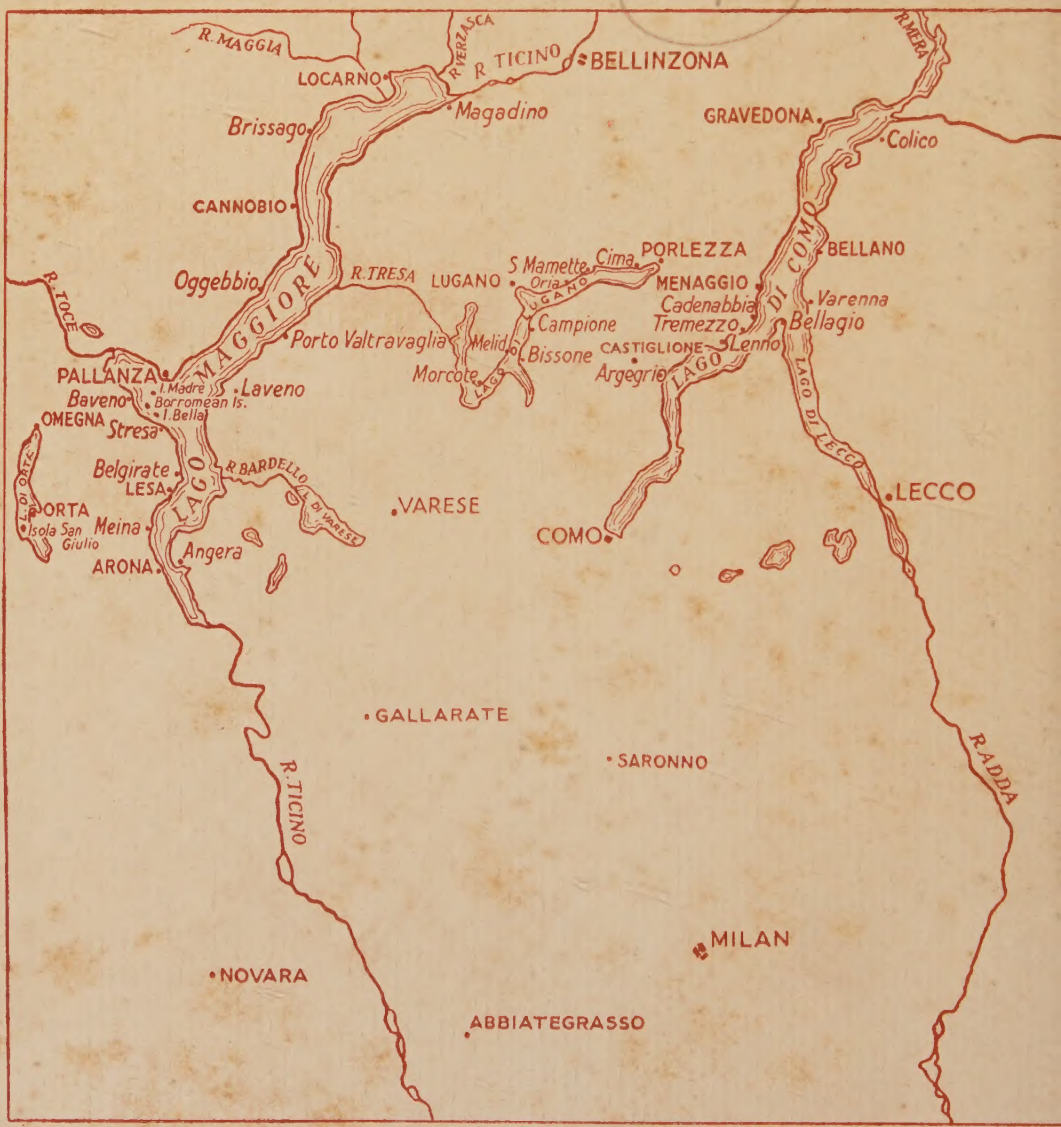
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THE ITALIAN LAKES

BY

GABRIEL FAURE

THE MEDICI SOCIETY LTD

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THE PICTURE GUIDES

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Que dire du Lac Majeur, des Iles Borromées, du Lac de Côme, sinon plaindre les gens qui n'en sont pas fous.

STENDHAL.

Viège.

CHAPTER I

The Enchantment of the Lakes

The Italian Lakes : magic words ! They thrill and transport me, as perhaps no other words can ; only to see or to hear them, in feverish Paris, makes my heart beat faster. It is in the last days of August that this charm is most potent. I have just returned to Paris from the coast, where the weather has been too uncertain to permit of daily bathing, or from the mountains, where the cold evenings have begun to set in early. My blood has been kindled by the sea-breeze, my cheeks still burn from the reflected blaze of snow and ice ; and I breathe the heavy air with difficulty. Outside, the avenues are too large for the groups of provincials and foreigners who are their only occupants. In the deserted thoroughfares the water-carts rumble, dispensing a stale and scanty moisture. Then a vision rises before my eyes and I half close

Brieg.

them in an effort to fix it and enjoy it to the full. I see lovely terraced gardens, bushes of rhododendrons, heavy with flowers, white boats on blue water, bright villas in the midst of cypresses, woods of chestnuts and olives. In a few hours my bag is packed, my seat taken. That evening I enjoy some of the most delightful moments in the year. From the carriage that takes me to the station I look disdainfully at the remnant of mankind which stays in the Paris streets. I pity the poor souls taking the air on the terraces of cafés, vainly seeking fresh air on the banks of the Seine. And a few minutes after, seated in the Simplon express, I feel the joy of the hunted beast in desperate flight who suddenly knows himself in safety. And I fall asleep, as Joffroy Rudel died,

„ Dans des odeurs de fleurs, dans des bruits de violes ",

with my head full of the wonders that shall attend my awaking.

Iselle.

Unfortunately, it is nearly always a dismal awaking. Daylight comes drearily through the curtains through which I peep. The train is climbing slowly and laboriously between high mountains, whose tops are lost in the clouds. I recognise the magnificent, but colourless Valais landscape. We pass Sion, where Chateaubriand, if he had continued in his embassy, could have nursed his eternal *ennui* to his heart's content; then Viège, at the foot of the towering mass of Balfrin. A heavy fog lies on the river and on the dewpearled meadows. The clouds droop lower and lower. I feel some drops of rain. I close the window, cursing — just my luck!

In the station of Brigue, a real deluge puts the finishing touch to my despair, and I think : So it is going to rain in Italy, too!

But, always, there is the same joyous and intoxicating surprise awaiting the traveller. A radiant, resplendent sun is shining at the

Domodossola.

mouth of the tunnel. The little town of Iselle lies basking in the light. We are in Italy!

Of course the descent of the Italian slopes is always delightful; delightful, too, is the sight of those Simplon and Gothard villages with their mingling of Alpine grandeur and southern softness. Here North and South meet, and the shock is so slight as to be almost imperceptible, if it were not so exquisite. Yonder, on the Swiss side, was gloom and greyness : here we have emerged into warmth and well-being. And to see the sky clearing and growing blue, the sun piercing the clouds and unfurling his golden banners over the country-side, as if for a festival : to feel the benumbed limbs relax, the eyes open wider to the stronger light, the blood flowing hotly in the veins, is to enjoy physical pleasures as perfect as can be; and I easily understand the lyrical feeling of all who experience them. Indeed, it would be strange not to be glad simply to be alive and breathing on that Latin soil. „ At twenty ", says Maurice Barrès, " we think of famous cities as we think of young women. They

Airolo.

trouble our hearts and we hurry to keep tryst with them ". In Italy, it seems to me, I am always twenty. Sometimes in crowded Paris, a glimpse of a picture, or of a street in sunshine, a tune heard for a moment, a reflection in the Seine, a flowering garden, is enough to call up for me an exact vision of some corner of Rome or Florence, of some village on the shores of the Lakes, and to fill me with irresistible longing to see again one of those little towns where, for a few days, I have lived, and which have seemed, ever since, to belong to me. Perhaps we leave something of our heart where we pass, like those perennial plants which take root as soon as they touch the soil. When I cross the Alps, following one of those roads by which the North approaches Italy, one of those *belles civilisatrices* as they are called by the author of the *Voyage de Sparte*, who asserts that „ each time that we descend them they make our souls grow younger ", the mere fact of crossing the frontier fills me with a childish and almost ridiculous joy. When I catch sight of the shores of Stresa or of Pallanza, I seem to see afresh what Leonardo da Vinci called the *bellezza del mondo*. I think of the blind Doge

Bellinzona.

who, at the taking of Constantinople, stretched his arms towards the conquered walls and asked the Crusaders where he must put his hands to have the illusion of possessing that Byzantium which he would never see. Virgil's magnificent lines come to my lips, and instinctively I repeat the exclamation of Pliny : Haec est Italia diis sacra.....

Lovely Italy, I will never make mock of thy lovers, even when they are carried away by their passion ! Their excesses enchant me. I remember the enthusiasm of Gœthe and how he held sacred the very dust that covered his carriage. And I was delighted the other day, on re-reading the last pages of Dumas' *Voyage en Suisse*, to find

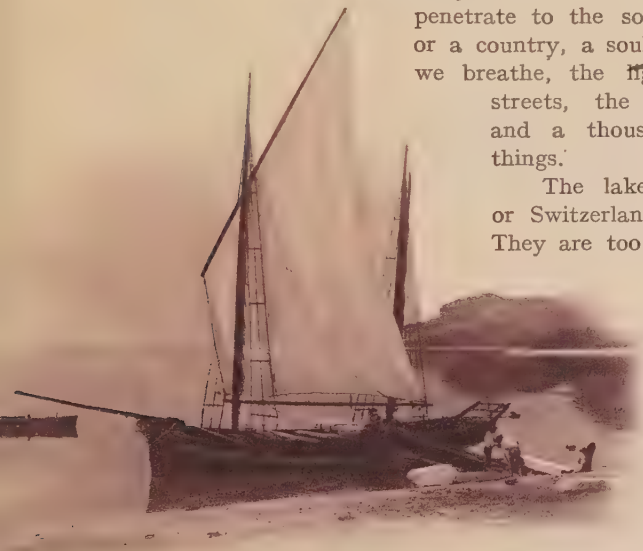
An Olive by Lake Lugano.

him almost taking leave of his senses when he first smelt the wind from Lombardy and saw, like swans sunning themselves, the groups of white houses, with their flat roofs. The nearer he got to Lake Maggiore, the more his romanticism overflowed. He saluted Italy, the ancient Queen, the eternal coquette who greets the traveller with the beauty of her women and of her flowers. „ Instead ", says he, „ of the goitrous peasants of Valais, we meet at every step those pretty grape gatherers, pale complexioned, velvet-eyed and soft-voiced; the sky is pure, the air is soft, and we recognise, as Plutarch says, the land beloved of the gods, the blessed and happy land which has preserved, through barbarian invasions and civil strife, the gifts bestowed by heaven.

It is only fair to add that the intoxication of arrival in Italy is due in great part to the fact that two of the principal routes lead to the peerless lakes. Stendhal, in his *Promenades dans Rome*, discussing the best way of reaching Italy from Paris, decides for the Simplon, because, as he says, it leads quickest to the shores of Lake Maggiore and the Borromean Islands. And to day it is still the shortest road. Less than fifteen hours separate Paris from Lake Maggiore. It is possible to dine on the Grands Boulevards and to breakfast the next morning at Pallanza.

No vision can exceed in loveliness the traveller's first glimpse of the Italian lakes. Like a garland woven of all the brightest and loveliest

flowers of a garden, nature has garnered all her enchantments in this happy corner of the earth at the foot of the Alps. Their charm is instantaneous and familiar. And this sudden impression of a lake, a town, or a country, is never misleading. It is nearly always final. Good or bad, it is rarely modified; it is at any rate never completely effaced. It is as with people who meet for the first time: from the first glance is born sympathy, indifference, or hostility. In the same way it seems that we penetrate to the soul of a lake, a town, or a country, a soul formed from the air we breathe, the light, the faces in the streets, the curve of the hills, and a thousand other impalpable things.



The lakes of Savoy, Bavaria, or Switzerland are not so friendly. They are too cold, too austere, too magnificent: they have not that combination of nobility and grace, that balanced proportion, and above

all that dreamy softness which is the peculiar possession of this Alpine slope which looks towards the land of light and beauty. Part of the charm springs, no doubt, from this contrast between the Alpine and the Southern landscape. „ Switzerland ! " you would say, looking at the white summits and at the snowflakes covering the spring flowers; but only Italy has this melody of language and of song, these sun-lit *campanile* which tell of a light-

Winter on the Lake side.

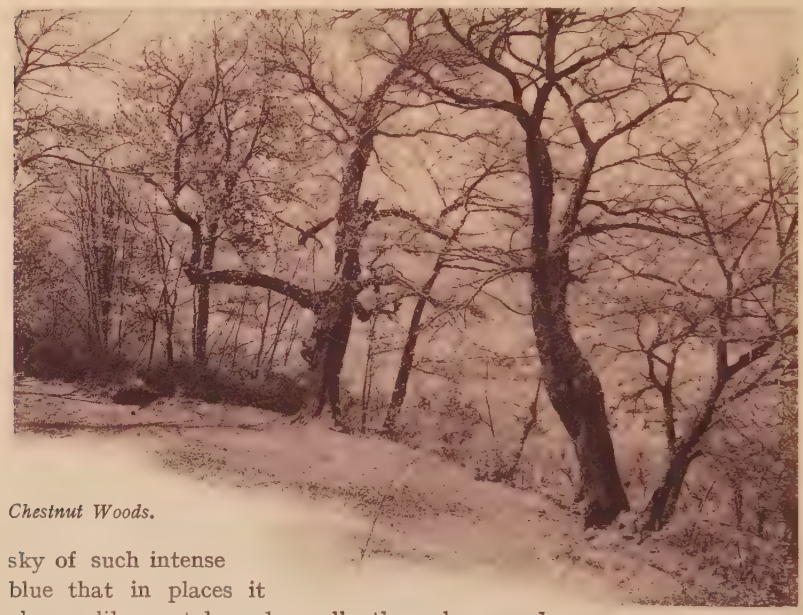
hearted religion, these dusty roads crowded with carts and wagons whose drivers sleep like logs in the full blaze of the southern sun, stretched full length on the awnings covering their loads. Nowhere can the luxury of being alive and the joys of laziness be so deeply enjoyed. I can well understand how Dumas, in his lodging at Baveno,

with windows opening on Lake Maggiore, found it hard to work! „ In that little inn ", he declares, „ I looked out on the loveliest country in the world, the weather was balmy, the sky was azure, and there I wrote the three worst articles I ever sent to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes.* " Not that I am at all anxious to live my life on the sweet-smelling terraces of Pallanza or of Bellagio; but it is pleasant to stay there for a few weeks and to know that one can always return

Lake Garda : Gardone.

when in search of peace or of a refuge for love.

Nothing is pleasanter than a walk on the winding shores of the lakes, especially where the road is impracticable for motor cars. Under the vivid light, the water shimmers like silk. Shady gardens reach down the banks. Vines trail from tree to tree. On the slopes are first olives and then, the conspicuous dull grey of evergreen oaks and chestnuts. Above, the bare mountains are outlined against a



Chestnut Woods.

sky of such intense blue that in places it gleams like metal, and recalls the colour used by the early painters to put behind the heads of their Madonnas.

But the greatest joy is to sail on the lakes in one of those boats with the graceful awnings, which can be found in all the little ports of the lake-side. Soothed by the monotonous rhythm of the oars, the traveller sees the land, with its white houses sparkling in the sun, slip past into the golden haze of the distance like a dream. Little villages on the hills cling round the campanile, like swallows' nests under a roof. The water has a sheen like the surface of a mirror. A warm breeze blows, heavy with the scents of the declining summer. From time to time the

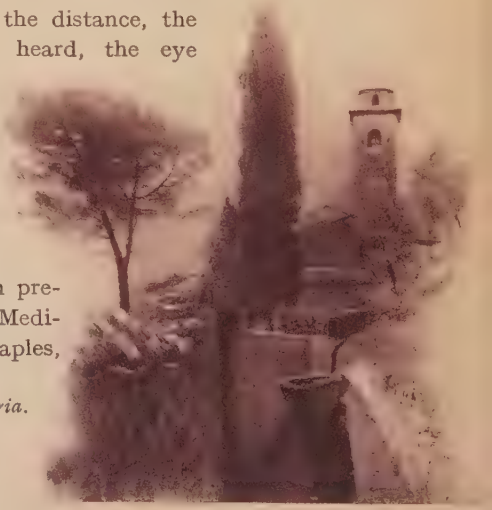
In the Market : Peasants of the Ticino.

Tropical Vegetation beside the Lakes.

On the Cadenabbia Bank of Lake Como.

wind comes so heavily laden with the perfumes of some neighbouring garden, that the boat seems to float on a cloud of incense. The air is so pure that the sounds from the two banks are distinctly audible, and when, from the distance, the strident voice of a steamer's siren is heard, the eye seems almost to see the waves of sound produced by the noise.

Water always softens the severity of a landscape, endowing it with an indefinable careless grace. But the individual charm of these lakes comes from the narrowness of the horizon, which limits the vision but feeds it with precise and exquisite detail. All along the Mediterranean coasts, on the Riviera, at Naples,



Lake Lugano : Oria.

Tropical Vegetation.

Palermo, Corfu, life can be enjoyed in surroundings just as magnificent; the gardens are equally beautiful, the air is as soft, the water as blue, and the sea adds majesty to the whole. But it is its very grandeur, its infinity, above all, its eternal restlessness, which prevents the sea from drawing us by such a close, such a physical attraction. It promises boundless adventure, it offers no rest for our eyes, no harbour for dreams, while the Lakes are within the range of our vision and of our desires. The sea is a woman

In the Gardens of Bellagio.

Lake of Como.
Promontory of Balbianello.

dancing, far off; she beckons, and the picture fades. The Italian lakes are beautiful young girls who are ready to make friends with us; like the nymph celebrated in one of Politian's verses, who comes forward, crowned with flowers, and with that gliding motion he admires so much and describes in words almost untranslateable, *il dolce andar soave.*

To taste the full joys of the Italian lakes they should be visited in spring or autumn. In April, the Alps once crossed, and the snowstorms left behind, it is a joy to emerge into the genial sunlight and to mark, with unwearied eyes, the flowering of the land.

The lines of the mountains stand out with unusual distinctness at this season of the year, and one remembers the *lumine acuto* of which Dante talks in praise of his native sky. The atmosphere, perfectly pure, not yet contaminated by the dust of summer, brings out the minutest detail of physical contour. The hills

A path near Lake Como.

streaked with delicate shades of colour, encompass the lake without imprisoning it, and show their fine curves and exquisite undulations better than in autumn. They are still visible through the network of branches made by the leafless trees. The snow, which still lies on the summits, flashes brilliantly on the crests and peaks under the blue sky.

And what a feast for the eyes is the flowering of the fruit trees which cover the countryside with dazzlingly fair garlands, like great leafless bouquets. Every branch is bursting and laden with flowers, evoking all the poetry of a Japanese spring. When the cherry trees begin to cast their blossoms, the ground, strewn with petals, is covered as with snow tinged with blood. Near by are other fruit-trees — peaches, pears, and plums — robed, as it were, for a ball in their new dresses. Once more they have assumed their wedding garments. Shivers of joy run through the tender green of the grass. In some places fields of rape sparkle like burnished copper. Lilies of the Valley open their buds, soon to be bells shaking their scent to the winds. In the hedges and meadows, on the edges of brooks and footpaths, beside the ditches, every where is the same profusion of primroses, buttercups, scarlet anemones, pink ranunculas, narcissus, and all those humble flowers whose names are unknown to me.

At the Fountain.

Bellagio.

Like the Tuscan spring of which Le Cardonnel sings,

> Tout n'est que lys, muguets, narcisses, anémones;
> Il flotte des chansons dans l'air musicien,
> Car il a triomphé. nous tendant ses couronnes,
> Le beau Printemps, aimé d'Ange Politien.

And how shall I describe the charm of gardens where orange trees bear both flowers and fruit, where Australian magnolias swing their supple corollas, and huge camelias unfold their polished petals? Mimosas, winter's glory, are faded; but the azaleas are ready to flower. And already, in the warm corners of the Villa Carlotta, a few precocious rhododendrons hang out their luminous globes. No season is more thrilling than this month of April, when the young shoots free themselves from the snows of San Primo or of Grigna. Ravishing fairyland, adorable magic, surpassing anything to be

found on the Mediterranean shores. Here, in this blest countryside, everything that can please the eye is gathered together. The tracery of flowering trees is outlined now against the azure of the sky, now against the emerald of the lake, and now against the snow on the overhanging heights. On the Riviera there is, so to speak, no winter, and spring is hardly known. But here spring is an enchantress, and the lakes, in this season, are, as the lakeside folk love to repeat, *un pezzo di paradiso caduto dal cielo.* For several days on end the peach trees shake their pink scarves under the rime-besprinkled forests, just as they do in the fairy tales, and from time to time snow-flakes flutter down on the red flowers of the first camelias. All around the lakes the young year dances, crowned with green leaves and scattering flowers, like Botticelli's goddess. And we think, too, of that other Venus of Lorenzo de' Medici who calls to us in the

Village Street.

Olives and Cypresses.

flaming verse of his unfinished poem of the *Amori di Marte e di Venere :*

> Vien, ch'io l'invito nuda in mezzo il letto :
> Non indugiar, ch'el tempo passa e vola;
> Copesto m'ho di fior vermigli il petto.....

But while the joy of the eyes reaches perfection in spring, the profound beauty and poetic attraction of the Italian lakes only makes itself felt in Autumn, when the heavy perfumes of the dying summer float about like incense. In the scented garden walks the mind reverts to Tasso and those groves in which a hero's heart was softened by the fragrance of flowers. The intoxication is at times too oppressive ; and lovers who have sought solitude there have found the spirit of the place so real and so sympathetic that it is almost an intrusive presence.

If this too celebrated

Agave.

Cypresses at Bellagio.

countryside is to be seen and enjoyed there is no time to be lost, for its visitors, who come every day in greater numbers, are disfiguring it rapidly. Some fifteen years ago I knew a Lugano that was still Italian in appearance and manners. What toothsome meals were to be had on the edge of the lake, cooked in the good Lombard fashion, and washed down with a bottle of old Barolo ! To-day it is difficult to find a *trattoria;* and a choice must be made between the big hotels where meals are cooked in the horrible international fashion, and the little restaurants where the food is neither Italian nor good. A multitude of hotels, villas, and houses of all sorts have risen along the roads, which often, in the most beautiful and warmest corners, look like the main street of a single town stretching all round the lakeside. Already there are districts, between Como and Cernobbio for example, where the road runs between walls on either

side and is crowded with tramways and motor cars. They were happy days when this country was so quiet that only peaceful tourists and handsome carriages were to be met, when trees and flowers covered the terraces and screened the railings of private properties so luxuriantly that the trespasser felt that he was taking a walk in his own park! To-day the very grass looks miserable and ashamed under its veil of dust. It is the penalty of a beauty fated by its own perfection to be extinguished, like the laurel on the Borromean Island on which according to legend Bonaparte engraved the word Victory on the eve of Marengo, so that it died from the mutilations of his too fervent admirers!

Locarno.

CHAPTER II

Lake Maggiore

Lake Maggiore — the ancient Verbanus of the Romans — owes its modern name to the fact that it is the largest of the three lakes commonly called the *Lombard Lakes*.

It extends over more than eighty square miles, which is almost twice as large as the Lake of the Four Cantons. In form it is like a sack, narrow and long (about forty miles in length and from one to three in breadth), and blown out, at the end where the Borromean Islands are situated, into a sort of vast pocket.

Castello di Ferro, near Locarno.

Brissago.

Into this enormous cavity, which is often more than a thousand feet deep, numerous rivers empty themselves. These are, first, the waters from all the mountainous region lying between Mount St-Gothard and Monte Rosa, which empty themselves by the Ticino, the Verzasca, and the Maggia, to name only the most important: then the streams carrying the overflow of the neighbouring lakes, the Bardello, issuing from Lake Varese, the Tresa, from Lake Lugano, and the Toce, which carries the waters from the Alps of Valais and Lake Orta. When from time to time all these tributaries become enormously swollen, they raise the level of the lake by many feet and cause disastrous floods on the banks.

The name of Ticino has been given to the stream which carries off the waters of Lake Maggiore.

Cannobio: Santuario della Santissima Pietà

Locarno
Madonna del Sasso.

When it leaves the lake, near Sesto Calende, it is a large navigable river whose clear blue waters recall the Rhône where it breaks away from the Lake of Geneva. Crossing part of the Lombard plain — where it feeds an ingenious system, of canals for irrigation — it empties itself into the Po near Pavia, where a famous covered bridge spans it.

The shores of Lake Maggiore are exceedingly picturesque and varied : wild in places, in others luxuriant, and in others hemmed in by steep and rugged mountains, they display a wide diversity of

Gallery of the Madonna del Sasso.

Gaudenzio Ferrari : The Bearing of the Cross.
Cannobio. Chiesa della Pietá.

Santuario di Maccagno.

character. The lake itself changes endlessly, according to the heat of the sun and the direction of the wind. I have seen it pale green and transparent, slumbering in quiet majesty; and an hour later it would be all harshness and gloom, and heaving with great waves lashed up by the wind.

The northern banks, which, by the way, belong to the Helvetic Republic, are Swiss in appearance, with here and there a look of Italy. Locarno is quite a southern town, although situated in a place of storms, at the foot of high mountains. In by-gone days the town lay all along the lake, but the latter has gradually subsided and every year the turbulent Maggia leaves more alluvial deposits increasing the distance between the two.

Some day, perhaps, the upper basin will be separated from Lake Maggiore ; and it is even possible — in

Santa Caterina del Sasso.

Laveno.
View of Monte Rosa.

a few centuries — that the earth carried down by the Ticino, the Maggia, and the Verzasca, will fill it up altogether. The old castle of Locarno, situated to the south west of the town and one of the strongest fortresses of Upper Italy in the days of the city's dependence on the Duchy of Milan, had a harbour communicating with the lake. This harbour, to-day, is only a muddy pool, the home of aquatic plants; and all about the castle are huge alluvial

The Gulf of Pallanza.

The Borromean Islands.

formations, called *salicetti*, gravel banks, on which willows grow.

Locarno, with its suburbs of Muralto and Minusio, is a fine town, of some ten thousand inhabitants, who belong to the Canton of Ticino; once it shared the honour of being the capital, in turn with Lugano and Bellinzona. The title has finally devolved upon the last. Crouching at the foot of moutains which rise steeply to a height of six thousand feet, Locarno lies basking in the sun. On its narrow shelf, it is like a fruit tree against a wall; the cold winds pass over without troubling it. Every year its soft and beautiful climate brings it greater reputation as a winter resort. The average temperature stands somewhat higher than that of Lugano. Magnificent magnolias and hardy camelias thrive there all the winter. Some of the trees in the Franzoni garden are counted among the most beautiful of the district.

Behind the town, a deep hollow with steep sides forms the bed — it is usually dry — of the stream called the Ramagna, and almost immediately beyond this another gorge opens, separated from the first by a rock on which stands the hospice of the Madonna del Sasso, dating from the xvth century, rendered famous by two visits of St. Carlo Borromeo in 1567 and 1570. It can be reached in thirty minutes on foot, or in less than a quarter of an hour by the funicular railway. The church contains a few works of art, notably a *Flight into Egypt* by Bramantino; but I confess that I prefer the

view to be had of the town and the lake. Higher up the mountain there are some beautiful walks, but already the siren of the steamer warns us that it is time to come down.

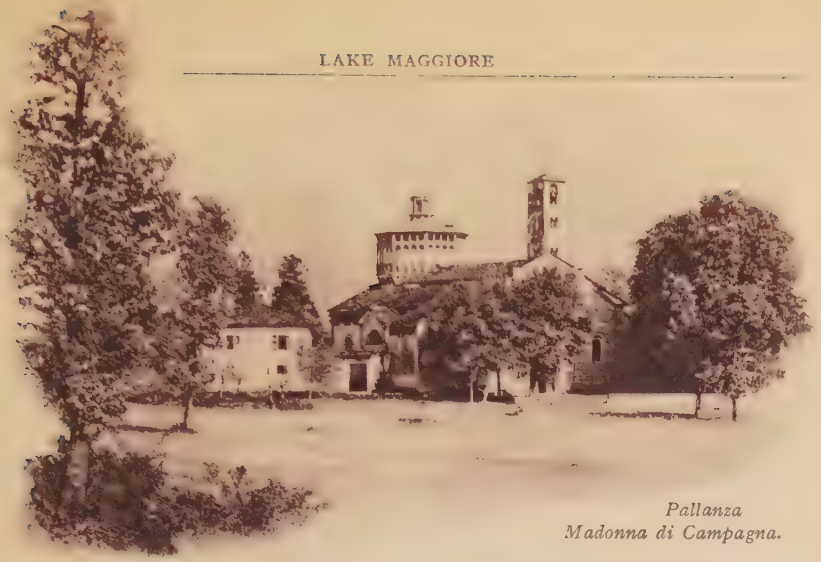
As we are leaving Locarno we have a splendid view of the town and of the mountains and the gardens, vines, country houses, and villages which make white splashes in the greenness. On the left bank the railway runs alongside the lake; on the right there is only the road which joins Locarno to Pallanza, but how delightful it must be to follow the windings of the coast on foot!

The steamer rounds the delta which has been gradually formed by the Maggia, neglecting Magadino on the left bank, prettily situated at the mouth of the Ticino, and Ascona on the other side crouching at the foot of its ancient fortifications and towers. Then it puts in at Brissago, admirably placed amid handsome villas and beautiful gardens, and very picturesque, into the bargain, with those hundred-year-old cypresses on the terrace of its church.

After Brissago, we enter Italy. The left bank belongs to Lombardy, the right to Piédmont. The Ticino and the middle of the lake make the limit of the two provinces; whence it follows that Piedmont, thanks to the growth of Pallanza, can claim the glory of possessing the most important and most beautiful portion of the so-called Lombard Lakes.

The steamer stops first at Cannobio, whose pride is the possession of a remarkable church, the Santuario della Santissima Pietà, which the

Pallanza :
Island of San Giovanni.



Pallanza
Madonna di Campagna.

State has classed among its national monuments. It is a building of the Early Renaissance, in the style of Bramante, with a cupola by Pellegrino Tibaldi, that excellent Bolognese architect of the XVIth century, who was honoured with a place in the poem in which Augustin Carrache explained how a good picture could be made by borrowing from each great master that which be did best. Tibaldi was to be drawn upon for his ,, solid proportions ". And as a matter of fact the proportions of the cupola of Cannobio are extremely successful. Unfortunately, the inner vault is spoiled by a superfluity of stucco and ornament. The church possesses an altar-piece by Gaudenzio Ferrari, the Varallo painter, whom we shall meet more than once on our road and of whom. I shall have something to say later. This picture on a panel, executed in 1525 for the altar it still adorns, represents *Christ Bearing the Cross* and is harmoniously composed, warm in colour, full of action, and of a noble gravity. The fainting Virgin in the foreground is admirable, so

Isola dei Pescatori.

too are the heads praised by Burckhardt, who pronounced this to be the artist's finest altar-piece.

We are indeed in a country of painters, for Luino, where we shall touch after stopping at Maccagno, claims the honour of being Luini's birthplace — but without sufficient evidence. The church of San Pietro, which stands a little way outside the town, has preserved a fresco attributed to him : it is an *Adoration of the Shepherds* and *Magi*, but in such bad condition that it is difficult to say whether it is by the master or by one of the numerous pupils he left in the district.

From Luino, the steamer once more crosses the lake and touches at Cannero, which is charmingly situated in the midst of olives, vines, and orchards, on the slope of Mount Carza. The climate of the coast, which here is wonderfully sheltered, is exceedingly soft ; orange and lemon trees are hardy growths. Two ruined strongholds, the *Castelli di Cannero*, lend a picturesque note to the landscape : in the fifteenth century they were the dens of the local pirates, the brothers Mazzarda,

Isola Bella from Stresa.

who imposed a levy on the lakeside folk and held at bay, for two years, the four hundred men sent by Duke Philip Visconti to put an end to their misdemeanours.

The steamer crosses again to the other bank, puts in at Oggebbio built in a series of terraces on the slope of hills covered with chestnut trees, and then it changes its course to take off passengers at Porto Valtravaglia, where there are some noble cypresses, and at Laveno, an industrial city of no great note, but with a magnificent situation opposite the Borromean Islands and the towering mass of Monte Rosa and the Simplon. The ancient convent of Santa Caterina is reached from Laveno, and here, too, begins the ascent of the Sasso di Ferro, which may not be the highest but is certainly the grandest summit of those parts. From the top there is a splendid view of the lake, the Alps, and the Lombard Plain as far as Milan.

Opposite Laveno lies all that is most marvellous on Lake Maggiore: the headland of Intra, the emerald gulf from whose

depths the Borromean Islands rise, the flowering gardens of Pallanza and Stresa. Even those who like myself prefer Lake Como, must admit that the general effect is incomparable. Why try to disparage it?

Isola Bella : Terraces.

Words are impotent before some of the glories of Nature, and, moreover, there is no one who does not know the landscape, either from personal experience or from some of the innumerable reproductions which have been made of it.

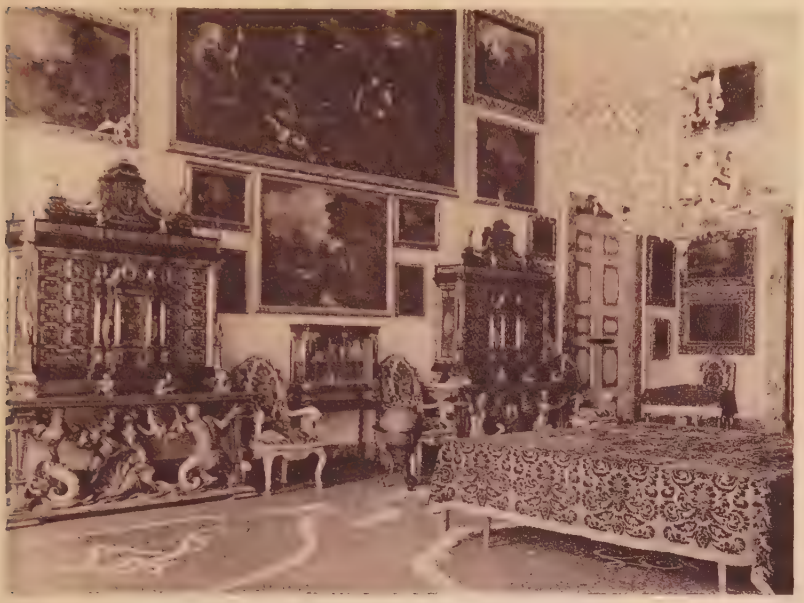
The supreme charm of this countryside lies in the villas and

Isola Bella : The Hercules Rotunda.

Terraces in Isola Bella.

Isola Bella : Tapestry Gallery.

parks whose greenery is reflected in the lake. The Italians have always made a cult of gardening. Pliny speaks so much and in such affectionate detail of his gardens that we could almost draw up plans for them. In a letter to Apollinaris he sings the praises of his ,, well trimmed hedges, his plane-trees with the ivy clinging in garlands about their trunks ". It was only much later, in the Renaissance period that natural beauty failed to please and had to be supplemented by complicated decoration, porticos, architectural fantasies, ornamental waters, and all those devices indicated in the fine phrase of Barrès : ,, The art of arranging reality in such a way as to delight the soul. " And yet, contrary to English and sometimes to French practice, the Italians were not given to artificial imitation of nature, their only object was to add to beauty, in accordance with the rules of Art. And they did this, in the first place, by utilising the terraces



Isola Bella : Music Room.

at their disposal, or, if need were, by creating new ones, as at Isola Bella. All the beautiful gardens of Italy, and particularly the gardens which adorn the shores of the lakes, are built up in terraces on the hill sides. Climbing those terraces, our feet keep pace with our dreams. The gardens of the Ile-de-France and of Touraine, on the other hand, extend over wide spaces which are flat or only slightly undulating; their lines are majestic and harmonious, but it is a cold, austere harmony like the periods of Racine and Bossuet. Here, the villas have a more sophisticated air and unless the sensibility of the observer is roused to appreciation of their particular style, their charm is lost. The vistas of Versailles are best admired in calm and solitude. The garden walks of Italy, with their sudden corners, their alternating heat and shade, their profusion of heady perfumes, attract wild and passionate hearts. Another characteristic of these gardens is

the number of vases, staircases, columns, balustrades, and statues which adorn them. Here, again, the Italians have always been masters, understanding better than anyone how well marble looks against a background of natural green, and how nobly the lines of a colonnade or the contour of a vase stand out against the sky. Finally, it is the cypress which gives to these gardens the peculiar character of their perfection. There is a sombre sobriety in the cypress which preserves the landscape from insipidity. There is something in these trees which has always commanded my respect. Gloomy, haughty, severe, impervious to the light and even to the wind which bends them without disturbing their leaves, careless of the weather, indifferent to their surroundings, standing defiantly erect, they are condemned to be for ever decorative sentries.

My favourite among the innumerable gardens of these parts is that of the Villa San Remiggio, which lies on the road from Intra to Pallanza, and which the glory of the Borromean Islands has cast into the shade. Never, it seems to me, has Italian art as applied to gardens been carried further than here. Everywhere are terraces, statues, trim box-wood alleys, columns, marble basins, flower beds, staircases, vases, and balustrades. The charm of the place makes itself felt most on a fine afternoon in autumn. As the light fades the fragrance of the flowers increases; heavy waves of perfume which have a strange intoxication,

Giordano Lucca : The Rape of Europa.

Baveno and Isola dei Pescatori.

steal over the ground. Beds of carnation are dotted over the lawns : geranium borders outline the walks. Clumps of purple sage gleam like the flames of a conflagration in the oblique rays of the sun; and purple gladiolas hang heavily on their long stems, as though weary. Only the statues, white against the green, seem alive in this dream landscape. On the warmest terraces, in the sunniest corners, oleanders, orange trees, and palms strike more vivid notes; but the air is cool and fresh among the high boxwood, which in the spring exhales a bitter sweet scent.

I greatly prefer these gardens to those of Isola Bella, where I am always disenchanted. There nature has been tortured into artificiality. Man has not been content to utilise the soil as it stood, in its naturally terraced formation; he has recreated it from top to bottom, even going the length of importing the vegetable mould

necessary for planting, and has accumulated so much marble, so many statues and vases, that the general effect suggests less a park than a piece of stage scenery. Nevertheless, so much having been said by way of criticism, I confess that the gardens are marvellous with their exotic flora, their coffee-plants, tea-plants, cinnamons, and gigantic cedars of Lebanon. All around there is a profusion of the sturdy shrubs native to those parts : myrtles, rhododendrons as tall as trees, huge oleanders, heavy with flowers, and groves of *olea fragrans*, whose intoxicating perfume floats over the lakes like a perpetual incense all through September.

Beside the garden stands the palace constructed in the middle of the seventeenth century by Count Vitaliano Borromeo. The building, which has never been completed, possesses some rather ornate *salons*, a room in which Napoleon slept, a little picture gallery in which I have noted in particular two portraits of Boltraffio, a series of tapestries, and a chapel containing the tombs of Counts Camillo and Giovanni Borromeo, fine Renaissance work, from the hands of Amadeo and Bambaja.

Isola dei Pescatori.

Sasso di Ferro seen from Isola Madre.

While less splendid, the two other islands are more delightful, especially the one named Isola dei Pescatori, which is completely covered with houses which squeeze each other to suffocation on their minute islet. The narrowness of the streets is amusing; it is difficult to imagine how the inhabitants — about three hundred — manage to exist in a space so exiguous; they must live, so to speak, in one another's pockets. Few corners of Italy are so Italian. At the extremity of the island is the smallest of shady squares, which is always littered with the nets of fishermen : this is the one and only public walk of the place. For those who know and like Milanese cookery, there are first-rate meals to be had at the old *Trattoria del Verbano.*

In Isola Madre, the largest of the three islands, there are also terraces, but they have not the studied graces of those of Isola Bella, and their vegetation is superior in beauty and variety to that of the neighbouring island. Everything seems to grow more easily. The park has

something wild and unstudied about it which is more restful to the eyes, and makes its shade more welcome. This park excited the admiration of Gustave Flaubert : ,, Isola Madre ! earthly paradise, where the golden leaves of the trees are gilded by the sun. One expected to see some gentle, grave sultan step from behind a bush, in his jewelled yataghan and his silken robe. It is the most voluptuously lovely place I have seen here; nature lies in wait for you with a thousand strange enchantments and the feeling you experience is exquisite. " On the last terrace an uninhabited castle commands a splendid view. It is really the centre of the whole panorama; we are in the middle of the lake, and of the circle of mountains which encompass it, yet near enough to the shores for every detail of the banks surrounding this incomparable bay to be seen clearly. On one side lies Pallanza, a real pleasure resort, crowded with hotels, villas, gardens ; on the other, Baveno and Stresa equally splendidly situated. And everywhere, all along the roads which curve round the lake is an uninterrupted succession of houses and parks, which it would be tedious to particularize. ,, This view " asserts Stendhal, ,, is the counterpart to that of the Bay of Naples, and is far more affecting. These islands strike me as doing more to develop a sense of the beautiful than St. Peter's ".

Isola Madre : Palms.

Vegetation in Isola Madre.

The southern portion of the lake is less interesting. Many buildings, belonging to rich Milanese for the most part, stand on the shores, but the latter are almost flat and have none of the picturesque appearance of those of which we have been speaking. The steamer makes successive stops at Belgirate, Lesa and Meina, all three on the western bank; then it crosses for passengers at Angera, which is dominated by the imposing mass of its castle, constructed by the Visconti and owned since 1439 by the Borromeo family; finally it ends its run at Arona, an old town, built at the foot of a steep cliff, crowned with ruins. The city has been highly prosperous since it became the junction of the Simplon railway with the lines from Genoa and Turin. Tourists may see a few works of art in its churches, but the statue of St. Carlo Borromeo, erected on a hill some way out of the town, is the great attraction. This statue, one of the largest in existence, is sixty-five feet high, and it stands on a pedestal thirty-eight feet in height. It was built in honour of Count Carlo Borromeo, born at Arona in 1538, who was a priest at twelve years old and cardinal-archbishop of Milan at twenty-two. But he proved himself worthy of these honours, he maintained strict ecclesiastical discipline, and himself showed a self-sacrificing devotion to duty at the time of the plague in 1576. Dying in 1584, he was canonised in 1610. The statue is very indifferent. Here

Lake side, Baveno.

is Flaubert's note on it : ,, Big, nasty, greasily painted, big ears sticking out from the head. General effect of ugliness." I allow the tourists to struggle painfully up the twisting staircase that leads to the enormous head, and retrace my steps to the lake to enjoy the sunset.

From this very spot, in this same month of September, Chateaubriand, on his way to take up his duties as ambassador at Rome, looked at this view without the least pleasure.

Sad and disillusioned, he found nothing to charm him. ,, Leaning on the balcony of the inn at Arona, I gazed on the shores of Lake Maggiore, painted in the gold of the sunset and brimming with azure waves. Nothing could have been sweeter than this landscape, where the castle battlements overlook the water. The sight brought me neither pleasure nor any sort of feeling. In our spring

time the world is wedded to our hopes; a young man goes wandering, bearing his love in his heart, or with his memories of past happiness. If he has no tie, he seeks for someone to whom he can bind himself; he believes, at every step, that he will find something wonderful; joyous thoughts follow him, and this attitude of mind is reflected in nature. " Thus wrote Chateaubriand seeing in Nature very little except himself; he might have forestalled the famous phrase of Amiel to the effect that any and every landscape is only an ,, état d'âme." Chateaubriand felt the approach of that moment which comes sooner or later to us all, when we rebel against nature's law of eternal rebirth, in which we can no longer share, when we wake each morning crying, like Gœthe, ,, Stay ! " to the flying hours. He was conscious of that shadow on the horizon drawing ever nearer. Never does death appear more cruel than when, in the midst of lovely surroundings, we are checked by the thought of the brevity of our life in the eternity of nature. In the fine words of Pope, ,, We have only time to look about us and to die. " But to-day these phantoms are far away. Let us enjoy the quiet hour, and admire, without an afterthought, those shores which, at the close of this September day, are as René saw them, ,, painted in the gold of the sunset and brimming with azure waves ".

Arona : Church and Monument to St-Carlo Borromeo.

Lake Orta.

CHAPTER III

Lakes Orta and Varese

Just as the cities which are posted on the road between Milan and the Adriatic are forsaken for the superior attractions of Venice, so Lakes Orta and Varese are neglected for the sake of Lake Maggiore, of which they are in a way the satellites, since their waters drain into it.

It is probable that before the glacial epoch, the plain of the Po was only a gulf of the Adriatic indented by a series of *fjords* corresponding to the beds of the lakes as we know them. The bottoms of the latter are in many places below the level of the sea,

Island of San Giulio.

and the fact that certain fish of marine origin are found in them can only be explained by this hypothesis. In the ice age immense glaciers descended from the Alps, filled up the hollows of the lakes, and flowed over the Lombard plain, where their moraines are plainly recognisable. As time went on the glaciers melted away, and as the level of the plain had risen slightly during the preceding period, owing to certain geological causes, the sea withdrew, and the *fjords* no longer communicating with it, gradually filled with fresh water. Their overflow was carried towards the Adriatic by rivers, some of which flowed directly into the Po, while others emptied themselves first into the lake lying at lower levels. This was the case with Lakes Orta and Varese, which are situated respectively at altitudes of 1214 and 967 feet, and empty themselves into Lake Maggiore, which lies at an altitude of 645 feet only.

Omegna.

Orta. A Square.

Visitors to Lake Orta, after leaving, at Domodossola, the express which has brought them over the Italian frontier so quickly that for the moment they are almost blinded by the sudden blaze of light, must board the little train which, after the luxurious sleeping-car, seems more than

Reflections on Lake Orta.

a century old, and which follows the old Simplon stage coach road from Novara. The direct line to Lake Maggiore was not laid down till after the opening of the tunnel. For some twelve miles the two lines run alongside each other and have some stations in common; they divide at Cuzzago. We cross the Toce, run along the western base of Mottarone, and arrive at Omegna, on Lake Orta.

Of all the lakes of Lombardy — for although it lies wholly within Piedmontese territory, it, too, can be classed in the group of Lombard Lakes — I am almost inclined to think it is the most perfect. The curves of the wooded hills which surround it are, as it were, in perfect rhythmical relation to the windings of its shores : it is difficult to believe that the same hand has designed both these gracious lines and the hard outline of the mountains which seem to shut the rude world out, like battlements. The island of San Giulio contains within itself all the various

Work under the Chestnut trees.

attractions of the Borromean Islands. The Orta foreland is almost as graceful as the promontory of Bellagio. And the lake has preserved that quality which is being torn from her too famous rivals by the civilisation which has invaded, transformed, and disfigured them, namely, the calm of nature. The plash of waves on the shore can be listened to for hours together without interruption from the throbbing of motor cars; one little steamer suffices for the service of the harbours. Automobilists rarely stray as far as the quay of Orta, which lies quite out of their way. It is one of the last corners of Italy not yet spoiled by modernism and progress. Unfortunately, this state of affairs is unlikely to last. The natives are anxious to attract tourists: they are forming *comités d'initiative;* they are tired of hearing their lake called Cinderella because it remains forgotten while its elders are courted. Before success crowns their efforts, let us enjoy the dreamy peacefulness of the autumn days on these shores where too soon there will be no more peace.

Island of San Giulio : Romanesque Pulpit.

Orta is delightfully situated at the foot of a mountainous peninsula, which crowds the houses at its base on to a narrow strip of land at the edge of the lake. The entire town is only one long street running parallel to the lake, with a shady, miniature piazza in the middle, adorned by a miniature town-hall. The slopes of the hill are covered with rich villas surrounded by that

Island of San Giulio : Romanesque Pulpit.

magnificent vegetation which abounds in the sheltered corners of the Italian lakes. In spring rhododendrons and azaleas of unusual loveliness grow in huge clusters. The hot summers are friendly to the oleanders, whose flowers are a feast for the eyes. The roads are lined

G. Ferrari : Marriage of the Virgin.

with fig trees and their somewhat harsh scent hangs on the air ; between the large leaves the gleaming water can be seen and the little island of San Giulio, quivering and smiling in the blaze of light.

A boat goes there in a few minutes. As you get nearer, the enchantment deepens; terraces and gardens seem to hang in air above the lake : deep down in the water you can see the reflection of the campanile and of the high walls of the seminary. The groves of plants and trees framing

B. Luini : Adoration of the Magi.

the houses give a gay look to this islet which is the head of a *commune* to which several villages of the western and southern banks are affiliated, Here are the town-hall, the church, and the cemetery : and here, therefore, come funerals and marriage parties, by boat, as in Venice. One very

narrow street, or rather one road between two walls, goes round the island. The whole effect is extremely picturesque. If Orta must, some day, be spoiled, this corner, I believe, will escape the general fate.

The basilica of San Giulio is a very interesting church, whose foundation local tradition assigns to the fourth century. Parts of it — its columns, capitals, bas-reliefs, and frescoes — are without doubt extremely ancient. The most remarkable piece of sculpture is a Romanesque pulpit, all in black marble, on which are carved several faces, emblems of the four Evangelists, and two curious panels, said to represent Christianity and paganism, symbolised by a griffin and a crocodile alternately triumphing over each other. If this interpretation, which I owe to the Keeper, is the right one, the artist showed great prophetic insight. Numerous frescoes adorn the pillars, vaults and walls of the chapels. The best are by Gaudenzio Ferrari, the admirable painter whom we have already met at Cannobio, and who was born on the other side of the mountain which overhangs the western base of the lake, at Valduggia, which can be reached in a few hours by way of the pass of the Colma, and of a

G. Ferrari :
The Flight into Egypt.

B. Luini : Adoration of the Magi.

forest of those old chestnut trees which are the ornament of the Piedmontese Alps. In any other country, this artist would be illustrious, but Italian art is so rich that he has been rather neglected. His fame has hardly crossed the borders of his own district which, it is true, retains the greater part of his works.

Like Luini, it is in fresco that Gaudenzio Ferrari showed his greatest mastery, and when his best work is looked at closely, it is evident that, draughtsmanship and grace apart, he improved upon his great contemporary. He has more life and he is more powerful. His two pictures, which are hung as a pendant to the two Luinis in the cathedral of Como, bear the comparison well. There are things in Gaudenzio that remind one of Signorelli. Some of the details in his work show a rather daring naturalism. I shall not go to the length of Corrado Ricci and speak of ,, modernism ", but he shows a determination in the pursuit of truth which at times gives a shock to the sensibilities. It is clear that throughout his life he was torn between the naturalistic tendencies which he inherited and

the idealism of the new schools of Central Italy, which Leonardo da Vinci had imported to Milan and had made paramount. It is this struggle which assures to Ferrari a place by himself, because, living his life in the mountains of Varallo and on the shores of the lakes he strove to preserve the spirit of his own people and to resist the influence of da Vinci. With his death in 1546 it can be said that Lombard art disappeared.

In the church of San Giulio, the frescoes of Gaudenzio Ferrari completely cover the second chapel on the left. These are, on the wall at the back, the *Virgin surrounded by Saints* and the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen;* on the pillars, on one side, *Saint Michael and Saint Apollonia,* and on the other, *Saint Julius and one of his Companions.* The faces, as Burckhardt has shown, are admirably executed. Unfortunately, those frescoes have been painted over earlier work of which traces still show. In certain places the remains of primitive paintings can be clearly traced. It is to be hoped that an effort will be made to bring those ancient Gothic or Romanesque decorations to light, by removing the works of Ferrari to another place. The latter are already much deteriorated by time and by the folly of the visitors

Orta : A Chapel of the Sacro Monte.

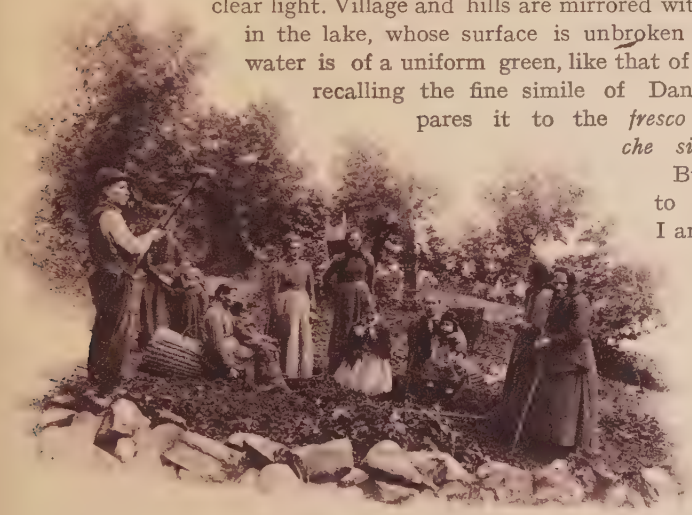
On Lake Varese.

who insisted on writing their names on them. It is some consolation to discover that this nuisance is not peculiar to our day: the guardian points with pride to inscriptions which date from 1536 and 1541, and are therefore almost contemporaneous with the work itself. He follows up this demonstration by trying to beguile me into the crypt where the body of St. Julius is buried, and then into the sacristy where I must see the bones of a gigantic serpent, for there is a legend that the island was for a long time uninhabitable owing to the reptiles which swarmed on it; but I take advantage of a demand for his services from other visitors, and give him the slip.

Lake Varese: Fishing among the Reeds.

Outside there is splendid, radiant sunshine. It is a day of exceptionally clear light. Village and hills are mirrored with perfect accuracy in the lake, whose surface is unbroken by a wrinkle. The water is of a uniform green, like that of melted emeralds, recalling the fine simile of Dante when he compares it to the *fresco smeraldo a l'ora che si fiacco.*

But the light begins to fail. Before night I am anxious to climb the wooded slope which stands out like a promontory, whose summit is completely



The Chestnut Harvest.

Varese : General View.

covered by a Sacro Monte, of which there are many to be seen in the district. The twenty chapels of which it is formed and in which groups of painted terra-cotta narrate the life of St. Francis of Assisi, are in no way remarkable; but the spot on which they stand is extremely delightful. It is a kind of park, occupying the very summit of the hill; at every turn of its walks there are views of the various sides of the lake. The mind instinctively reverts to the paths of the Villa Serbelloni which overlook in turn the three arms of the Lario; but here the impression is more austere, owing to the abundance of religious symbols and the absence of flowers. Even the trees have an indefinable solemnity. In the dying light, enormous pines, with trunks as straight and smooth as columns, lift their heads to the sky, a company of big brothers; the breath which shakes one of them makes them all vibrate and shudder together. The little white chapels look as if they leant for

Cathedral of Varese.

support on the strong pillars of their cathedral. On the height there is peace and the whole panorama is unrolled at one's feet. Already the villages, huddled on their hillsides, are swathed in blue haze. The folded lines of the mountains make a dark cup at the bottom of which the lake lies at rest. Opposite us, the peak of Monte Rosa towers above the woods of Pella; and the whole valley prepares itself for sleep.

The lake of Varese is better known, by name, than Lake Orta, but is far from being as picturesque or charming. It owes its reputation to the town of Varese, which is really a delightful place, and to literature. Stendhal, for one, speaks of it often, and some ambiguous words of Taine have led many — and notably Maurice Barrès — to believe that he would have liked to have a country house on the shores of this lake. As a matter of fact, Taine hardly knew the lake, having been satisfied with a distant view of it from the road leading to Laveno on Lake Maggiore. Indeed, it is the great drawback of Lake Varese that it is too far from the town, where visitors are sufficiently amused by the charms of the public gardens and of the Madonna del Monte.

Varese : The Public Garden.

Madonna del Monte and Campo dei Fiori.

Varese is a gay, prosperous, and animated city, and at the time when its famous markets and its races are being held, it swarms with life. Italians will tell you it is one of the most delightful neighbourhoods in Lombardy; the Milanese, for example, have adopted it as one of their favourite summer resorts, and have built many luxurious villas there. As it is almost unknown to tourists, a comfortable idleness can be enjoyed there in the majestic calm of its public gardens, if care is taken to avoid feast-days. These gardens are some of the most beautiful in the North of Italy. They are formed from the park of what was formerly the *Corte*, built by Francis III of Modena, in the XVIIIth century. Laid out in the old Italian style, they are exceedingly noble and severe. Hundred-year-old elms encircle vast lawns. I remember seeing them in spring, when the air was thick with the fresh scents of camelias, chestnuts, Australian magnolias and lilacs. To-day the groves are redolent of the weaker but more subtle odours of autumn. In the distance a wooded eminence,

Varese : Fourth Chapel of the Sacro Monte and View of the Town.

Sacro Monte : First Chapel.

covered with fir trees and umbrella pines, gives an even grander character to the garden. From this terrace the view extends over the Lake of Varese to the chain of the Western Alps, dominated, as always, by Monte Rosa ; while behind, looking over the roofs of the town, lie the Madonna del Monte, and, farther off, the Campo dei Fiori which rises above the plains to a height of three thousand two hundred feet ; an incomparable panorama, disfigured, a few months ago, by the construction of a funicular railway. A cog-railway has now for some time dishonoured the illustrious hill of the Madonna, which used to be ascended on foot, or in a wagon drawn by oxen, up a rough zigzagging road. How much more pleasant was the gradual climb, and how much more splendid the view at every turn of the path ! There is a magnificent panorama to be seen from the summit. The whole of Lombardy is spread out before the eye and even Milan can be guessed at, on the horizon. Six lakes are within sight : to the left, Como; in front, Varese; to the right, the small Lakes of Biandronno, Monate, and Comabbio; finally, and far beyond them, two reaches of Maggiore. It was, no doubt, these two reaches which made Stendhal count seven lakes to be seen from this spot. ,, Magnificent ", he exclaims, ,, One can pass through the whole of France and Germany without receiving such an impression ". And certainly there are few views as splendid, especially about night-fall, when

Entrance to Sacro Monte.

Sacro Monte : Seventh Chapel.

the sheets of water gleam like golden reliquaries. And yet, for all his rapture of admiration, Beyle was profoundly sorrowful, so sorrowful that he could hardly bear to look at his fellow travellers, two of whom, at least, so he tells us, were exceedingly pretty women. ,, Having no time to be in love with either of them, I give all my love to Italy. I cannot get over my sorrow at having to leave this country." No doubt he meant what he said, but, besides his regret at leaving, he had memories that were like a bitter taste in his mouth. Like Chateaubriand at Arona, Stendhal saw little but himself in the face of nature, although he can say that a landscape,, plays on my soul like a bow on a violin", and: can write a phrase so characteristic as this : ,, The outline of the rocks, near Arbois, seemed to me a visual image of the soul of Métilde. " On that June day of 1817, Beyle remembered another ascent made six years before, on an October morning, ,, when the sun rose in the midst of vapours, when the lower slopes looked like islands swimming in a sea of white clouds. " He had a light heart

Summit of the Sacro Monte

that day. He was on his way to meet Angelina Pietragrua, whom he had known in his youth, whom he had just seen and found more beautiful than his imagination had painted her during the long separation, and who had become his mistress. But the Madonna del Monte was unkind to the lovers. Although the curé's brother had entrusted him with the *benedetta chiave*, the key of the door communicating with the peristyle of the church, he never again found the pretty Milanese. Whether it was done to inflame his love, or whether her husband's jealousy was really roused, in any event, she had arranged to evade him. On this terrace where I stand and admire the view, Beyle meditated on love and waited in vain for the woman whom he was afterwards to call a *coquine*. A century later, almost to a day, this remembrance adds a tender, romantic interest to the landscape on which Stendhal's unseeing eyes rested.

Lake of Lugano seen from Mount Brè.

CHAPTER IV

The Lake of Lugano

The Lake of Lugano — the Roman Ceresio — is situated between Lakes Como and Maggiore, and belongs almost entirely to Switzerland, while the last two are exclusively Italian, except for the northern end of Maggiore. Only the extremity of the Porlezza arm of the Lake of Lugano, the little territory of Campione and the western bank from Ponte-Tresa to Porto-Ceresio fall within the kingdom of Italy. Its general configuration and the ruggedness of its features, are, for that matter, characteristically Swiss, and recall, particularly, the lake of the Four Cantons. For the most part it is very wild and typically Alpine. The

Bay of Porlezza.

central portion only, the Bay of Lugano, has any pretensions to rival, in smiling grace and harmonious beauty, the famous landscapes of its great neighbours. Tourists who are pressed for time can afford to miss the bare and rugged scenery of the arms of Capolago, Porto-Ceresio, Ponte-Tresa, or Agno. For all that, a place to itself must be assigned

Morcote.

to Morcote, which lies at the extremity of the great peninsula formed by San Salvatore and has a delightful situation at the foot of the vineyards which rise in terraces on the slope of Mount Arbostora. The village stretches along the water's edge. The houses are built, for the most part, over arcades. Above, the vineyards rise in tiers up to the church with its high *campanile* and its cemetery ornamented by cypresses and sculpture. It is really a picture and a delicate one; only it has become somewhat hackneyed owing to the numerous reproductions made of it.

That part of Lugano which is, if I dare say so, really Italian is the basin lying between Porlezza and the railway bridge which cuts the lake in half so disgracefully between Melide and Bissone, and even then I should confine myself to the northern slope of this basin. The southern bank is almost entirely wild; Campione alone, in its little corner, with its brighter and more smiling aspect, seems to try to justify its claim to be Italian territory. This is the fatherland of the famous Lombard sculptors, the *maestri campionesi*, who were, in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries, the chief masons of Milan cathedral. Ancient

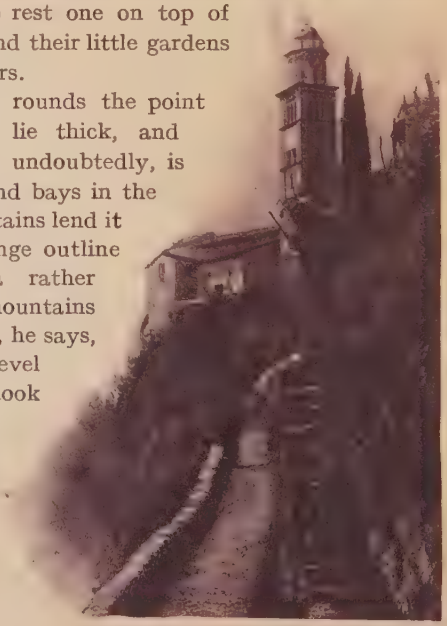
Monte Salvatore seen from the Quay at Lugano.

Mélide.

frescoes adorn the walls of the fine church of the Madonna dell'Annunziata.

The banks of the lake from Porlezza to Lugano, open to the sun and protected by the mountains from cold winds, are, on the other hand, most charming. First comes Cima; then San Mamette, with the village of Castello far up the slope behind it; Albogasio; and finally Oria, the proud possessor of the villa in which Fogazzaro used to pass his autumns. The only sign that we are in Switzerland is the bother we have with the custom-house, for the village of Gandria is thoroughly Italian. With its back to the base of Mount Brè, it rises in terraces almost toppling over the lake; the houses built on arcades seem almost to rest one on top of each other, mingling their roofs and their little gardens and the shade of their oleanders.

After Gandria, the steamer rounds the point of Castagnola, where the villas lie thick, and enters the Bay of Lugano. Here, undoubtedly, is one of the most beautiful inland bays in the world, and the overhanging mountains lend it an especial grandeur. Their strange outline provoked Chateaubriand to a rather surprising comparison: „The mountains surmounting the lake of Lugano", he says, „join their bases only at the level of the lake; this gives them the look of islands separated by narrow canals. They recalled to me the grace, the shape, and the verdure



Church of Morcote

Bridge at Mélide.

of the Azores archipelago. " From their clear summits there are splendid views over the lakes, the Alps, and Lombardy. There are few countries with so many funicular railways; at Lugano four can be counted: one at Salvatore, one at Generoso, one at Lanzo d'Intelvi, and one at Mount Brè.

These mountains make a magnificent frame for Lugano, which stretches around the lake for several miles, in a wonderful curve. It is truly the Reine de Ceresio, as local people call it. With its twenty thousand inhabitants it is the most beautiful and the largest city of the Ticino.

Between Maggiore and Como there is no more perfect centre for the tourist who does not wish to hurry his visits to the three lakes. It has all the advantages and resources of a town, with the added comfort that it can be left at any moment in one of the

Bissone.

Church of Campione.

numerous steamers which furrow the lake in all directions. It has a very southern look, which was enough to attract Chateaubriand when be came there in 1832. A fugitive from France and the monarchy of July, he had taken up his residence at Lucerne and seems to have tried to find a retreat at Lugano; but such houses as he found to his mind were too expensive and he had to give up the idea. He did not even sleep at Lugano, returning the same day to Lucerne; but he had had time to see the town and his description of it in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* could not be more exact :

,, Lugano is a little town of Italian appearance : porticos as at Bologna, people living out of doors, as at Naples, Renaissance architecture, roofs projecting over walls without cornices, long, narrow windows, bare, or adorned with a capital, and pierced right into the architrave. The town lies back on a slope of vines dominated by two tiers of mountains, pasturage on the one, forests on the other; the lake is at its feet. ''

Life is delightful at Lugano, and delightful are the strolls through the old streets or on the quay. Going towards Castagnola or Paradiso, the glimpses of the town and the lake have an infinite variety and the views become still more beautiful on the way up the hill to the church and the station. At the end of winter, or in the first cold days of September, this view is incomparable. At the far end of the bay of Porlezza the cone of Legnone, a patch of whiteness, is framed between green mountains; beside Mount Brè is Boglia, covered with snow, and above the roofs of the town is the mass of white crests which overhang Locarno and the

Church of Bissone.

Church of Campione : Interior.

Church of Campione : The Cupola.

Church of Campione : Detail of Fresco.

northern sides of Lake Maggiore. But the most famous view is the one to be had from the little terrace in front of the church of San Lorenzo, whose charming marble fount, dating from the Renaissance, is the work of Tommaso Rodari, the Lombard sculptor whom we shall meet again in the cathedral of Como.

Cima.

Lugano is very proud of the work of a local artist of the last century, Vincenzo Vela, who was born at Mendrisio, and made a speciality of monuments. Nearly all the cemeteries of the lake sides possess some of his statues, notably the one at Gentilino. His most famous work in Lugano is the *Grief*, in the Villa Ciani, on the end of the quay, at the mouth of the Cassarate. This monument was erected by the two brothers Ciani to the memory of their mother who died at Milan while they were exiles in Switzerland during the Revolution.

Near Lugano you can still see a *Madonna* by Guercino, at Bigorio, where there is a picturesque convent ; and, at Ponte Capriasca, a small village between Taverna and Sonvico, there is a tolerable copy of Leonardo's *Last Supper*.

But the artistic glory of Lugano is bound up with Bernardino Luini, some of whose best work remains in the church of Santa Maria degli Angioli. Its mean façade, facing the quay,

Cima : Madonna della Caravina.

Oria : Villa Fogazzaro.

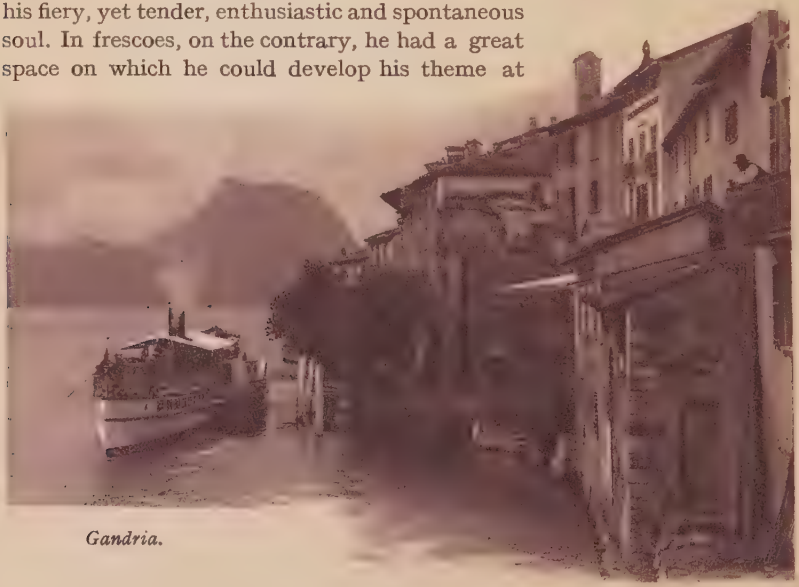
offers no promise of hiding within the frescoes of Luini, the great Luini, whose very name is so musical that it evokes all the softness and the poetry of the lakes on whose borders he was born, lived, and died. Here, truly, is a sanctuary after my own heart ; the shabby mediocrity of the outside conceals, as in a shrine, the soul of an artist. After four centuries, it is almost unchanged ; here, so near the cosmopolitan snobbery of the hotels, one can pass long hours without being worried by tourists or by guides.

Albogasio.

San Mamette.

Gandria.

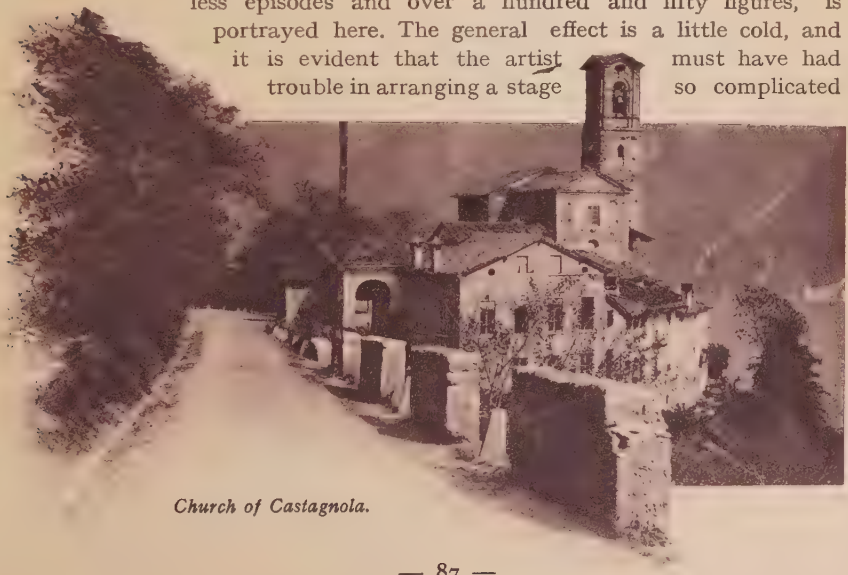
In default of a pilgrimage to Saronno, where the greater number of his works have found a home, Luini can be studied in these frescoes at Lugano better than anywhere else. Above all he is a *frescante*. If he is judged only by his pictures it is impossible to understand the fine genius of an artist who, on a restricted surface, found no room to pour out his fiery, yet tender, enthusiastic and spontaneous soul. In frescoes, on the contrary, he had a great space on which he could develop his theme at



Gandria.

Rock of Gandria.

his will. Unrestricted either by want of time, or by having to work to order, he recognised no law but that of his own imagination. He threw his whole self into the work, with all his qualities and his defects. Nowhere can he be seen better than on these walls, where he painted his most spacious composition. The whole of the *Passion*, with its numberless episodes and over a hundred and fifty figures, is portrayed here. The general effect is a little cold, and it is evident that the artist must have had trouble in arranging a stage so complicated



Church of Castagnola.

Bay of Lugano.

and so theatrical, but the details are delightful, and Luini has seldom created faces more moving than those of the pathetic St. John pledging himself to the dying Christ, and the Magdalene kneeling at the foot of the Cross and smiling in ecstasy from beneath her long golden hair.

Before the works of Luini I almost always receive three successive impressions. First, I feel the rapture which springs from the joy of the eye in a harmony of tones and colours. Every time I enter this church and catch sight of this *Passion*, the word *charming* comes naturally to my lips. Then, looking closer, I am a little disillusioned : some groups are rather

Laveno.

Monte Salvatore seen from Gandria.

confused, some faces are inexpressive, some perspectives false. But I look into the details, I walk away, and I try to get a clear impression of the whole; and once more Luini conquers me. He has so many fine tones, such masterly shading, so much softness and sweetness informing every part of his work, that I lose the power of criticism. I am captured, as I am by some music which I know quite well to be commonplace, but which holds me from the first bar.

Monte Salvatore and lake Lugano.

And how delightful is the *lunette* representing the *Virgin, the Infant Jesus, and John the Baptist.* Formerly placed over the door leading from the cloister to the refectory, it was removed to the church at the time when the cloister was demolished to make room for the big hotel of to-day. According to Burckhardt, „ its beauty is worthy of Leonardo. " It was above all in these single figures, playing no part in any big composition, that Luini excelled. I would readily give the whole of the great fresco for this *lunette* alone.

Nowhere can the soul of the painter, his genius and tender

Funicular Railway on Monte Salvatore.

Panorama of Lugano.

philosophy, and his smiling faith be better divined than here. In this sheltered corner, he found, as it were, a refuge from the overpowering Leonardo and could speak straight from his own simple heart. We get a glimpse of what Luini, relying solely on his own inspiration, could have become, and we feel that perhaps the school of Milan, without the advent of da Vinci, might have risen as high as the

Lugano.

Panorama of Lugano.

other schools of Italy, and might have had in Luini the equal of Titian, of Correggio, and of Raphael. But the great Florentine had only to show himself to conquer. The sap of original talent everywhere dried up. The qualities of health, robustness, and grace which had distinguished the old Lombard masters vanished, as if by magic, before a reputation which could brook no rival. Artists gave themselves over to the imitation of the inimitable;

Under the Arcades.

Church of San Lorenzo.

they could no longer paint a face without giving to it the enigmatic smile and the mysterious eyes of the *Gioconda*. The influence of Leonardo is so marked in some of Luini's pictures that their authorship is still a matter of doubt. In his frescoes, on the other hand, he has preserved his

Ponte-Capriasca : Copy of Leonardo's Last Supper.

Convent of Bigorio.

individuality; in fact, nothing can be more opposed to the premeditated, minutely finished painting of the subtle Leonardo than the art of fresco, where everything depends on inspiration, on the first rapid, telling strokes, and hesitation or correction is impossible. The one artist tried to render on canvas the most mysterious feelings of the soul and to express by means of colour and design all the learning and complexity of his mind : the other, with no other motive than to live his own life and enjoy the exercise of the craft that he loved, was content to be a faithful journeyman of art, keeping his brush busy on the walls of churches. Luini was not an intellectual : his works fell from his hand as the juicy and luscious fruit falls from the trees in his native land. This is most evident in the works of his youth, when he was still free from outside influence, for example, in his *Nymphs Bathing*, whose free and modern workmanship recalls Puvis de Chavannes and Renoir. His work breathes the joy of being alive under a happy

sky. At a time when war and plague ravaged Milan, he managed to live in a kind of dream, so hidden from the public gaze that our scanty knowledge of his biography is taken merely from the dates of his canvasses and frescoes. Either from necessity, as the story tells, or from mere love of quiet, he was content to live retired in the calm of cloisters,

V. Vela : Monument in the Cemetery of Gentilino.

V. Vela : Grief.

where, for a mere pittance, it may be, but free from material cares, he gave himself up to his art, *la mirabile e clarissima arte di pittura*. He worked for many months in this sanctuary of

B. Luini : The Crucifixion (detail).

Lugano, where he seems to have made prolonged sojourns, and where, after four centuries, something of his soul, eternally youthful and still the soul of a dreamer, lingers about the walls like a perfume. Nowhere, save at Saronno, have I, at any rate, felt myself so near him. He is the true painter of those lakes and that enchanting countryside. And yet Stendhal could say, referring to the beauty of Lombardy, ,, that no great painter has made it immortal in his pictures, as Correggio made Romagna immortal, and Andrea del Sarto Florence ". Apart from the strangeness of the comparison, it is an injustice to Luini. For my part, I think that the latter has given perfect expression to that beauty of which Manzoni speaks, *molle a un tratto e maestosa che brilla nel sangue lombardo,* to that race at once gentle and robust, and

B. Luini : St. Rochus.

above all to those large-limbed, soft-eyed women, with their sensitive nostrils and cheeks with the bloom of ripe fruit.

The greatest works of Luini are still to be found in Lugano, Saronno and Milan and should the traveller be journeying to the two last named places, he would be wise to complete his survey of this enchanting master. More especially should he study the masterly series of pictures to be found at Saronno depicting. The Life of the Virgin which are in the Church of the Pilgrimage. Here the Virgin is represented with a beauty and dignity worthy of the

B. Luini : St. Sebastian.

greatest period of the Italian Renaissance, and it is at Saronno, as I have already remarked, that I get into closest touch with the great painter of Luino.

The first Basin of Lake Como.

CHAPTER V

Lake Como

Como is the most beautiful of the Italian lakes. If Maggiore bears the palm for size and majesty, it cannot — apart from the corner which holds the Borromean Islands — compete with Como for charm, harmony and colour. Better sheltered, the latter has a more southern vegetation. Of the Italian lakes, it is the most Lombard ; and that not merely because it lies wholly within Italian territory, but because it presents, in full measure and overflowing, all the splendours and all the graces which the name of Italy conjures up for the imagination.

Como : The Duomo and Broletto.

Como : Door in the side of the Duomo.

who possessed several country houses on its shores, was inconsolable whenever business took him away to Rome, or elsewhere.

To a more fortunate friend, in permanent residence on *his* lake, he writes : ,, You are a happy man to be able to live among that magnificence ".

The praises of *Larius Lacus* have been sung from the days of antiquity. Cassiodorus, in his time, proclaimed it *ad solas delicias instituto*, and Pliny the Younger,

Como : Door in the side of the Duomo.

Virgil's often repeated praises are well-known.

The artists, novelists and poets of modern days have not been behindhand. ,, This lake ", says Shelley, ,, surpasses in beauty anything I have seen up to now. " It inspired Stendhal to some of his best pages, and it is on these shores that Manzoni placed his *Promessi Sposi*. And

Torno.

indeed nothing more smiling, nothing fairer or more pleasing to the eye can be imagined than this emerald cup, set in the circle of shapely hills, crowned towards the north by the snow-clad summits of the Alps. And the landscape is as varied as it is splendid; olives alternate with chestnuts, mulberries with walnuts; forests are succeeded by frowning crags, ruined castles, chapels, villages on the hillsides, hamlets by the water's edge, villas in their lovely gardens, and great parks! Whoever has not made the tour of the lake on one of the big white steamers which ply between the ports, only to feast his eyes on the marvellous views spread out with such prodigality, has no idea of the amount of beauty nature has in store.

Torno : Church of San Giovanni.

Lake Como is shaped like

Cernobbio.

a Y upside down and is divided into three reaches ; the northern reach, that of Lecco, and that of Como, which is much the most remarkable. It is some thirty miles long, and at its greatest breadth, between Menaggio and Varenna, it is not more than two and a half miles wide. The great number of promontories, which cut into its area, give the impression that it is not a single sheet of water, but a series of little lakes ; if they hinder a general view of it, they add to the picturesqueness of its details. The two principal affluents of the lake are the Mera and the Adda, which carry into it the waters of the Alpine chain; the only stream issuing from it is the Adda, which leaves it to the south-east, at the extremity of the Lecco reach.

Como is a fine place of some fifty thousand inhabitants, and by

Cernobbio : Garden of the Villa d'Este.

Sala and Comacina Island.

far the most important town of all those on the banks of the lakes. Tourists are usually in a hurry to make the acquaintance of the lake and rather neglect the town. I remember when I did the like, and even, following Maurice Barrès, made fun of Taine, who in his *Voyage en Italie* gives more pages to Como than to the lake on which it stands. Indeed I cannot take it all back, for Taine's chapter is extremely amusing. When he left Milan, he threw his cap in the air : „ After three months passed in front of pictures and statues, one is like a man who has dined in town every day ; give me a pineapple and some bread. One

Brienno : Church of San Vittore.

Cernobbio : Park of the Villa d'Este.

boards the train with a light heart, knowing that at the other end there will be water, trees, real mountains, and that the landscape will no longer be three feet long and framed in four gilt bars." And

A Prospect of the Tremezzina District

the next day, after having made a tour of the lake without leaving the steamer, he dedicated a brief page to the marvels which had passed before his eyes and for which he had apparently longed so fervently; then, unable to resist the temptation to pay a visit to the Duomo, he wrote a whole chapter in which he expatiated on the happy mixture of Italian and Gothic in the works of the Renaissance.

But, after having

Promontory of Balbianello

Comacina : Ruins of an old Basilica.

examined this Cathedral more closely in detail, I can understand Taine's enthusiasm. Taken at the end even of a journey in Italy, it can beguile and hold the tourist who is in search of beauty. Side by side with the black and white marble of the Broletto, the front is wonderfully original, with its three divisions marked by vertical strips of superimposed statuary. One portion is finely wrought and richly decorated. The central door, surmounted by five tall figures and a rose, is flanked to left and right, by elegant windows, above which are seated the statues of the two Plinys. I note everywhere an abundance of statues; the very ledges of the windows are decorated

Panorama from Sala to Bellagio.

with them; perhaps a hundred are to be counted on this front, which, owing to its wide flat space, appears at the first glance almost bare. The architectural detail

Lenno.

Ospedaletto : Campanile.

is now Gothic, now Renaissance; rarely can one see so clearly the struggle between the tendencies which divided the xvth century, as here, materialised in marble. These works of the transition period have, moreover, a simplicity and a vigour of accent which speak of young and healthy art. Doubtless, as Taine observed, certain too literal imitations of reality reveal immaturity and the exaggerations show an excess of inventive activity, but this very desire to seize life and express it is, even in its awkwardness, more attractive than wise and cold perfection. And, let it be remembered, Lombard sculpture was above all ornamental, and strove only for general effects; Lombard artists were deco-

Lenno : Crypt.

Tremezzo.

rators rather than sculptors. This can be better understood by looking at the two doors which open at the sides of the cathedral. The south door may possibly be by Bramante; this has been disputed, but it seems to me his mark is there: the amplitude of the design, sobriety of detail, firmness of line, and nobility of the whole effect are, in any case, worthy of the great architect. I am confirmed in this opinion when I turn to the other door, the work of the brothers Rodari, called generally the Porta della Rana, because of the frog carved on one of the pillars. It is evident that the two Lombard artists were anxious to surpass

Entrance to Villa Carlotta.

Villa Carlotta.

their model : they have only succeeded in making richness too rich. Why those figures on the entablature and that niche surmounted by statues? Why those huge carved columns, overloaded with ornament, like the support of an altar? I recognise the hands and the minds of the artificers of the Duomo of Milan, and the Chartreuse of Pavia.

But we must not imitate Taine: rather let us turn to the lake which is heaving gently in the sunlight, in the words of Carducci :

„ ... palpitò il lago di Virgilio,
come velo di sposa che s'apre
al bacio del promesso amore."

Here, Baedeker, like all the other guides, for that matter, does not know where to turn; there is such a wealth of beauty on both the banks between which the steamers run backwards and forwards, that he is reduced to making a statement, in parallel columns, of the wonders which should not be missed by tourists.

Villa Carlotta : Staircase on the Front.

For all that, the eastern bank which is wilder and steeper, is the less interesting. As far as the promontory of Torno, it is covered by a series of villas, some of which are magnificent. This corner seems to have been from the first a favourite resort of the great Italian artists, since we find there one after the other the Villa Capranica, owned by the Ristori, the Villa Roccabruna on the site of that belonging to Giuditta Pasta, the famous *cantatrice*, for whom Bellini composed *La Somnambula* and *Norma*, and the Villa Taglioni. After Torno, where there is the old door of San Giovanni to be admired, the country becomes wilder, and the front of the Villa Pliniana can be discerned standing out distinctly from the dark background of the mountain. The palace of today, in the midst of its

Alley of Azaleas and Rhododendrons.

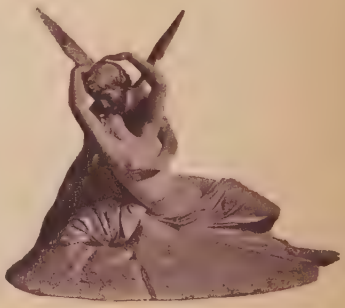
Gateway at Villa Carlotta.

tall cypresses, is built on the site of a house of Pliny's beside an intermittent spring, which greatly intri-

Villa Carlotta : Sculpture Gallery.

Villa Carlotta : Sculpture Gallery.

gued his imagination, so that he wrote a letter to Licinius Sura, enumerating all the explanations possible in those days of the phenomenon, which is as strange to-day as ever it was. It is one of the wildest spots in this usually kindly countryside, and it is not strange that this sinister, mysterious setting added to the wonder and fear of the ancients. Let us return to Como and follow the western bank. Immediately outside the town magnificent villas have sprung up. I shall only mention the Villa Saporiti, where Bonaparte stayed, and the Villa dell'Olmo, one of the largest in the district, rather too solemn for my taste, with magnificent *salons*, and a superb park. At Cernobbio the ancient Villa d'Este, which was constructed in 1658 for Cardinal Gallio, and



Cupid and Psyche. Canova.

Menaggio.

at the beginning of the nineteenth century sheltered the scandalous love-affairs of Queen Caroline of England, is to-day a great hotel, whose park, with the cascade of Hercules, and alleys of high cypresses has really a very noble appearance.

The way down to Menaggio.

It would be tedious to try to describe all the palaces and all the country seats adorning the villages we shall find on our road after Cernobbio : Moltrasio, Urio, Carate, Laglio, Torrigia, Birnno, and Argegno,

at the entrance to the beautiful Val d'Intelvi. All are picturesque and prettily situated, either at the water's edge, or on the side of the hills, in the midst of parks and terraced gardens, where thickets of flowering oleanders, predominate.

Gravedona.

After Argegno, the scenery becomes more and more enchanting. The shore of the lake, growing ever greener, is indented by a series of gulfs in which nestle exquisite fishing hamlets, smothered in trees and flowers : Colonno, Sala, Campo. On the other side, across a narrow strip of water, is the island of Comacina, the solitary island in lake Como. Tiny and covered with greenery, it often played a historic

Rezzonico and Monte Legnone.

Gravedona : Palazzo del Pero.

rôle in the Middle Ages, when it was an imposing fortress. Recent excavations have brought to light some interesting archæological remains. The legend to the effect that in former days an important city with nine churches stood on this islet, is, no doubt exaggerated. All the same, it is an undoubted fact that about the XIIIth century the people of Como had a way of sacking towns and destroying buildings. To-day nothing remains but a little church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, hence the island is occasionally called *Isola San Giovanni*.

Piona : Cloisters.

Near Campo, at Ospedaletto, may be seen the Gothic tower which is one of the artistic curiosities of the district. After this the steamer rounds the point of Balbianello, where in 1785 the splendid Villa Arconati-Visconti was built ; the graceful porticos of this palace, hung about with flowers and foliage, can be seen looking out on to the two reaches of the lake, towards Como and towards Bellagio.

Gravedona : Silver Cross XVIth Century.

Here is Lenno, whose church has a very ancient crypt, the site of the two villas which Pliny called *Tragœdia* and *Comœdia*, because of their situation,

Varenna.

the one standing on the height, the other at the water's edge, ,, the one wearing the buskin, the other the humble sock. '' Half-buried shafts of columns and capitals testify, in fact, to the existence of magnificent buildings.

Bellano.

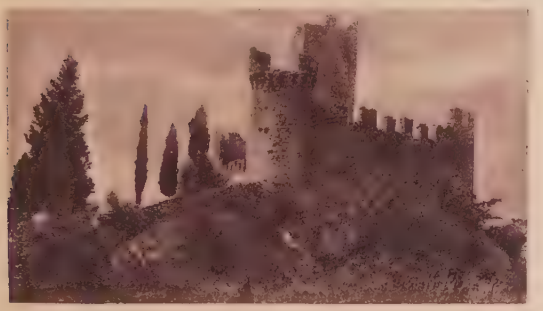
Here the delightful Tremezzina country begins, stretching from Lenno to Cadenabbia, a kind of belt of land along the lake side, where the villas are so thickly studded that they form one great park. This corner, from its exceptional fertility, was christened the *Garden of Lombardy*, a name revived in our day by Maurice Barrès, who has applied it to all the country about the Italian lakes. The village of Tremezzo is its central point, a charming winter resort, climbing the slope of Mount Crocione, in the from of an amphitheatre. A magnificent

Corenno Plinio : Tombs of the Andreani.

walk of ancient plane trees follows the lake side as far as Cadenabbia, passing the graceful wrought gate of Villa Carlotta, the rival, for beauty, of Villa Serbelloni, facing it on the other side of the lake. This is the ancient Casa Sommariva, so much admired by Stendhal, which, although re-named, is still as perfect and splendid as ever.

Lecco.

At Villa Carlotta visitors can see two marvels : first the gardens, with their tropical vegetation, their cedars, camelias, magnolias, and huge myrtles, their hedges of rhododendrons and azaleas, their groves and grottos between which amazing glimpses may be had of the gleaming lake, and their almost overpoweringly strong scents ; secondly, at the entrance to the Villa, a marble hall, in which there is a collection of wonderful sculpture. I cannot



Castle of Vezio.

San Giovanni and Villa Melzi.

confess to much admiration for the work of Canova in this hall, not even, in spite of its reputation, for the Group of *Cupid and Psyche*, which so excited Flaubert's enthusiasm that he tells us in his *Notes de Voyages* he bestowed almost a lover's kiss on the Psyche; but Thorwaldsen's *frise en relief*, running round the wall, is really extremely decorative.

From Cadenabbia to Menaggio, where the little railway joining lakes Como and Lugano comes to an end, after a marvellous descent, the lake side is one long procession of gardens and villas, each vying with the other in luxury and elegance. Then comes the northern portion of the lake, which

Promontory of Bellagio seen from Lake Lecco.

after the splendours we have left behind is less interesting and attractive. And yet how charming are these villages, strung like beads on a coral chaplet, along the blue waves! Here is Acquaseria; Rezzonico, at the foot of its old castle, with the peak of Mount Legnone opposite; Cremia, whose fine church is justly proud of an altar-piece by Veronese; Musso and the ruins of the

Villa Melzi.

ancient fortress in which Giacomo Medici so long defied the power of the Sforza; prosperous Dongo, whose name reminds us of Stendhal's hero. Here, finally, is Gravedona, with its imposing castle dominating the lake — Palazzo del Pero or del Frova — built by Pellegrino for Cardinal Gallio, it is a perfect type of the princely villas of the end of the XVIth century, with its great open porticos between the two main wings. At Gravedona there is also a fine XIIIth century church, which should be seen, Santa Maria del Tiglio, also the crypt of San Vincenzo, and a rich collection of religious objects, including, notably, a superb cross in silver, dating from 1508, the work of a native artist of the name of Gregorio de Gravedona.

Villa Trotti.

Cypresses of San Giovanni.

Leaving behind the end of the lake and some poor fishing villages, set in the midst of marshes formed by the deposits of the Mera and the Adda, we pass to the eastern bank, which we are now going to follow, from Colico, the last place of call of the steamer, and an important station, the terminus of the Engadine and Valteline lines.

From Colico to Lecco, the road and the railway follow the lake side, and as the mountains in many places run down sheer into the water, the two tracks are very varied, sometimes built up on an embankment, sometimes running through tunnels. Few tourists visit Piona, in spite of its beautiful cloister, the only one left on the lake; or Corenno Plinio, where the Andreani tombs in the church and castle are among the most curious Gothic monuments in the district. On the other hand, Dervio is the stopping place for all those who are tempted to the ascent of Mount Legnone, the highest summit in the country (12563 feet).

Bellagio.

After Bellano, guarded by its lines of cypresses, with its fine church whose alternate layers of white and black marble recall the buildings of Tuscany, begins the prettiest part of the eastern side, which seems to be trying to match the beauty of Menaggio and Bellagio opposite. Varenna, among its splendid gardens, is one of the most frequented resorts on the lake. Above it are conspicuous the ruins of the Castle of Vezio.

The reach of the Lago di Lecco, entered immediately afterwards, is of a quite different character. The cheerless banks, framed in steep mountains, seem wild and unfriendly;

Bellagio : Pulpit in San Giacomo.

especially after leaving the flowery landscapes of the other shore. They become a little brighter towards Lecco, an industrial and commercial town, of some ten thousand inhabitants, made famous for ever by Manzoni in his *Promessi Sposi*. The most picturesque sight is an old stone bridge, of ten arches, built in 1335, with the remains of towers at its extremities. It crosses the Adda, which flows out of the lake here and forms, near by, another little lake, called Garlate, which is a kind of continuation of the Lario and encloses a little island also celebrated by Manzoni.

Bellagio seen from Cadenabbia.

Between the two arms of Como and Lecco stretches the mountainous and fertile country of Brianza, a delightful country to live in and almost wholly unknown to tourists. It is true that locomotion is somewhat difficult there and that the only road which joins Erba, the chief town of Brianza, to Bellagio, is not very practicable.

Bellagio : Via Serbelloni.

The Peninsula of Bellagio.

The situation of Bellagio is unique. Stendhal, in the *Chartreuse de Parme* praises its position ,, on the bold promontory which divides the two branches of the lake, separating the rich beauty of the Como reach from the severity of the part running towards Lecco : sublimity and grace here combine to a degree which is equalled but not surpassed by the most famous site in the world, the Bay of Naples. " The little town is charming, with its spacious arcades running along the quay, its fine shops, and its hotels, its little streets like stairs, the top steps losing themselves in grass, and its graceful peasant women who go clattering over the flags in their zoccoli, wooden sandals covering only the toes. Charming villas, set in splendid gardens, are dotted between Bellagio and the little village of S. Giovanni, with its noble cypresses : the Villas Trotti, Poldi-Pezzolli, and, above all, the Villa Melzi, which almost rivals the Villa Carlotta, for its artistic treasures and its park.

Villa Serbelloni : Grotto and View of Varenna.

But the glory of Bellagio is the ancient Villa Serbelloni, to-day an annex of the Grand Hotel, whose gardens spread out round the marvellous promontory, commanding views of the three stretches of the Lario in turn. In the words of Flaubert, the whole scene is one of ,, an incomparable beauty. " To feel the full charm of the place you should at the close of a September afternoon, wander down walks planted with all kinds of creepers, with camelias, magnolias, myrtles, pomegranate trees with knotty, twisted trunks, like huge plaited cables, with citrons, with cacti, brandishing their blue-stained blades, with gigantic aloes with heavy, fleshy leaves. From the flower beds and the over-heated earth rise scents more intoxicating than the must of vats, odours as potent as those exhaled in spring time, in the saturated atmosphere of Mercato Nuovo at Florence. It is like walking in a hot-house, in a fiery mist of flower dust; or, again, one might be bathing in a pool

Bellagio : Terraces of Villa Serbelloni.

Villa Serbelloni : Palms.

of liquid perfume. And stronger than all the other scents, the *olea fragrans* scatters its potent aroma. No tree emits, when in flower, a more subtle and penetrating smell than this olive of the Far East, which has become acclimatised on the shores of the Italian Lakes, where it blooms in September. A single shrub is sufficient to perfume a whole garden : in the neighbourhood of its leaves there is, as it were, a cloud of invisible incense.

At every step, across the confusion of greenery bordering the path, there are magnificent glimpses of the shores of the lake, of Bellagio, a diamond contrasting brilliantly with the sapphire of the three lakes in

Villa Serbelloni : Terraces.

Vegetation at Villa Serbelloni.

which it is set, and of the hamlets nestling beside the water, like animals dazed and lazy in the sun. The pink and white villas are conspicuous, bright country-houses standing among their shady gardens.

In the walks the honey-bees suck the flowers and pass on heavy laden. Pigeons strut on the gravel-paths, lazily, without the strength to fly away, like those doves of the Borromean Islands of which Barrès speaks, who, half drunk with the swarming perfumes of the terraces at Isola Bella, rose on so slow a wing that it would have been possible to catch them in the hand. A golden vapour hangs about the tips of

the cypresses, which vibrate in the metallic air. The Virginia creeper draping the trees looks like blood, and others, covered with ivy, or starred with climbing rose, recall the flower-clad porticos of Mantegna.

On the highest terrace, at the very top of the promontory from which one overlooks the northern banks of the lake as if from the prow of a tall ship, parasol pines stand gracefully silhouetted against the sky. Lower down the gardens are steeped in a blue haze. Below the great sheet of water reflects like a mirror the tones of gold and copper cast over everything by the dying light, Ripples run over the water like the gleams in shot silk. There is a light like a blush over the countryside, and every village wears its halo. Near at hand, Varenno, at the opening of the vale of Essino, lies fresh and cool among its gardens. The Fiume Latte is dried up by the heat : but the course of the torrent can be traced where it comes down, in Spring, like a stream of milk.

Few scenes are so moving. Florence, indeed, seen from Fiesole or San Miniato, and the sweet Umbrian Valley viewed from Giardino di Fronte, at Perugia, stir the feelings more profoundly; but there is certainly no vision more enchanting than this. The only possible fault is that it is too voluptuous, too physical a beauty. But nowhere else can the saying of Flaubert be better understood : „ There are some places in the world so beautiful that you want to clasp them to your heart. "

Menaggio.

Lovere : on Lake Iseo.

CHAPTER VI

Lakes Iseo and Garda

Just as the little lakes Orta and Varese are often neglected for Lake Maggiore, so the delightful Lake Iseo, which is a kind of tiny miniature of all the others, is often overlooked for the attractions of Lake Garda. And yet Iseo has a vegetation as luxuriant as that of its illustrious neighbours, or of Lake Como, landscapes wilder than those of Lugano, and, like Lake Maggiore, a grand background of mountains; the snowy summits of the Adamello chain, the Pian di Nive, and the glaciers of Salarno. Small as it is, it is even so original as to offer an island of its own, the island of Montisola, the largest lake island of Italy, whose ridge is some thirteen hundred feet above the level of the lake.

I love this corner of Italy : there is something of the spirit of France in the air. Listen to George Sand : ,, When I first saw this countryside ", she says, ,, I could have believed myself in some soft Virgilian eclogue. " And here, as we know, she dreamt her stormy dreams, and put some-

Castle of Montisola.

thing of herself, a good deal, perhaps, into the story of the unfortunate loves of the young prince Karol de Roswald and Lucrezia Floriani.

The ancient *lacus Sebinus* of the Romans is formed by the Oglio, which comes down from the vale of Camonica. The dolomitic ridge of Guglielmo overlooks it from the west, and separates it from the vale of Trompia. Pisogne and Lovere, at the end of the lake,

Road on the edge of Lake Iseo.

are the most important places on it. The latter, in the midst of a beautiful landscape, clusters round the feet of Santa Maria in Valvendra, a beautiful church of the end of the XVth century, possessing some interesting pictures and frescoes by local artists. The Tadini Academy also contains a few meritorious works, but nearly all re-painted and restored.

At the south of the lake, there is not much worth mentioning.

Iseo.

except the little hamlet of Iseo, from which its name is derived, and which prides itself on an old castle of the time of the Scaligers. On the western bank, the picturesque village of Tavernola, where I can remember breakfasting twenty years ago, in a rose-clad arbour, is now nothing but a heap of ruins and gaping walls. On the 3rd March, 1906, part of the village slid into the water and was swallowed up... Nowhere is the thought of death more agonising than among the splendours of nature. I think of the *surgit amari aliquid* of Lucretius, and of that idea of Maurice

Pisogne.

Barrès who wanted to have the cemeteries of these villages placed at the very edge of the lake so that they might receive the caresses of the waves made by the boats dancing on their bosom. So lovers would cling more closely to each other at the reminder of mortality, and exult in the present like those Venetian couples who made the sign of the cross as their gondola glided past the red walls of San Michele. Is it not natural, for that matter, that joy should seem all the more desirable to us when we think of its frailty and that it can perish in the moment of its birth? ,, Born in the same hour, love and death are brothers ", says Lespardi, in an elegy whose severe workmanship recalls the bare country round Recanati. This idea haunted the

Tremosine.

Castle of Sirmiono.

Sulzano and Peschiera on Lake Iseo.

Italian soul. Even Dante, in the *Vita Nuova*, rose to a greater height of passion at the thought of the winding-sheet covering Beatrice.

But we must not imitate Chateaubriand at Arona. Once

Lovere.

Malcesine.

Limone and Lake Garda.

more we must banish these ghosts. Let us learn from these ruins at Tavernola to enjoy wisely the few days which remain to us, and let the dead past rest.

* * *

The *lacus Benacus* of the Romans is the largest of the Italian lakes and is unequalled in majesty. It runs to a point at the north, where it is narrow, with steep sides, recalling the *fjords* of Norway. In the south, on the contrary, is is like a little sea, which the east wind, the *vinezza*, lashes into high

Lake Garda; Riva.

waves. Virgil mentioned the furious storms sometimes raging on this lake, in the Georgics.

„ The Lake of Garda ", wrote Renan to his friend Berthelot, „ is admirable. It is the most beautiful of the lakes of the Italian Alps. A hole in the midst of enormous piled-up mountains, it is astonishing. Virgil is right : it is really a sea ".

The shores of the lake are excessively fertile. Citrons and orange trees grow vigorously in the shadiest corners. The olives cover the hillsides like forests. Caper-bushes hang from all the cracks in the walls. Huge oleanpers cast their shade over the roads.

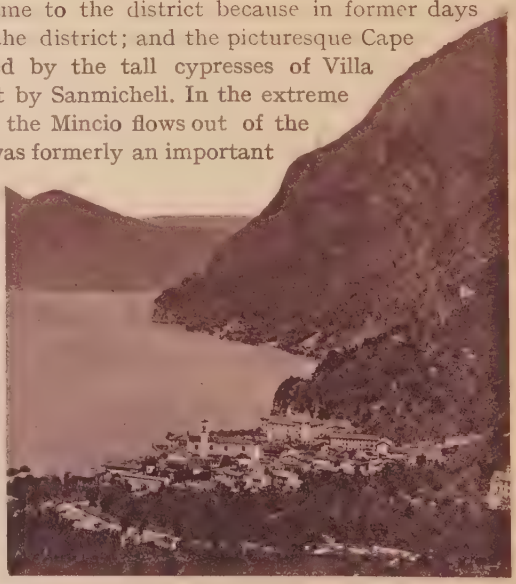
Cypresses at the lake side.

The eastern side, except at the northern extremity, which is sheltered by the long chain of Monte Baldo, is not very interesting. In the lower part, I can remember nothing much worth

Castle of Lazise.

General View of Riva.

mentioning except Bardolino, whose vines produce a celebrated wine; Garda, which gave its name to the district because in former days it was the chief town of the district; and the picturesque Cape of San Vigilio, overlooked by the tall cypresses of Villa Guarienti, which was built by Sanmicheli. In the extreme south, at the point where the Mincio flows out of the lake, lies Peschiera. This was formerly an important place, held, successively, by the Scaliger family, the Venetians, Napoleon I^st^, the Austrians, and, finally, the Italians. It was one of the points in the famous quadrilateral designed to bar the Austrians from the valley of the Po.



Marone.

The Ponale Road.

Desenzano is the place of embarkation for visitors to the eastern side. Crossing the gulf formed by the long peninsula of Sirmione, the steamer stops at the extremity of the narow strip of land, at the little fishing village which was, in days gone by, the famons *Sirmio*, celebrated by Catullus. The wealthy Romans had numerous country houses there, and there, too, the poet built a villa. The remains of this villa are supposed to have been found; such, at least, is the popular belief

The Promontory of San Vigilio.

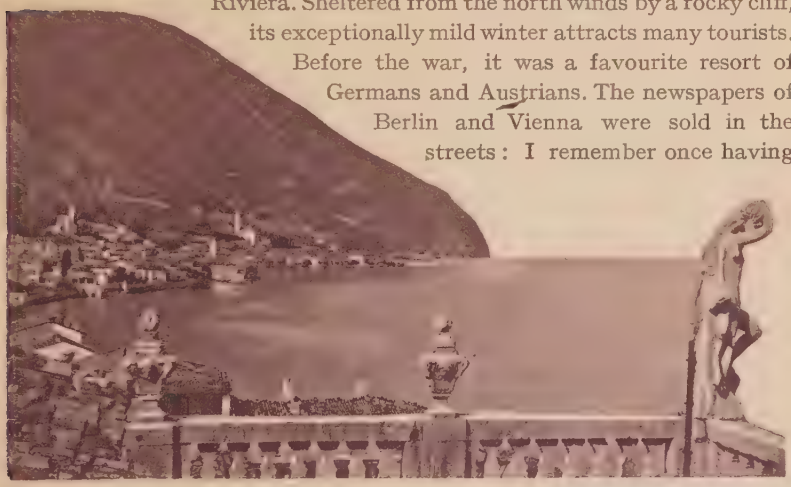
and the inhabitants will point with pride to certain old Roman substructures which they call the „ grottos of Catullus ".

Returning westwards, the steamer rounds the *Rocca di Manerba* a high promontory running sheer down into the water; passes a rocky island, and enters the bay of Salo, the warmest and most fertile corner of the lake. Here begins the *Riviera bresciania*, which can compete with the most famous landscapes of the Borromean Islands, or of Bellagio

Torbola.

Salo, a pretty little town, of five or six thousand inhabitants, was formerly the chief town of the *Magnifica patria della Riviera,* which for several centuries was a dependency of the Most Serene Republic.

Gardone is the most important of the cosmopolitan resorts on the Riviera. Sheltered from the north winds by a rocky cliff, its exceptionally mild winter attracts many tourists. Before the war, it was a favourite resort of Germans and Austrians. The newspapers of Berlin and Vienna were sold in the streets: I remember once having



Gargnano.

to make use of my scanty knowledge of German to obtain information.

Here, still on the Riviera, is Maderno, where the Dukes of Mantua built the Gonzago Palace, and, on the mountain-side, the Palazzina; finally, Gargnano, at the foot of Mount Comaro, prettily placed among olives and citron-trees.

Now the lake becomes wilder. Its formidable rocky sides, rising steeply out of the water, are superb in the early morning, lit up by the fires of the rising sun.

The northern sheet of water, which now belongs to Italy, ends at Riva, a beautiful and picturesque city, magnificently situated at the foot of the Rochetta, whose shade is so pleasant on a summer afternoon. From the Ponale road, which climbs the mountain, there is a splendid view of the lake, the Monte Altissimo, and the chain of Monte Baldo.

Close to Riva, on the eastern bank, is the charming village of Torbola, with a beautiful romantic cemetery. It was here that Gœthe embarked for Italy. „This morning", he writes, „ I left in a two-oared boat. The weather was fine, although a little cloudy ; a favourable wind allowed us to set our sail ". Does it not sound like Ulysses

The Quays of Salo.

Maderno.

telling the story of one of his voyages on the cerulean sea? And is it not wonderful to think that it was from this little harbour of Torbola that Gœthe received his first impression of Italy, and that his eyes opened to all its beauty as the eyes of his Faust beheld the vision of re-conquered youth?

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